COMICS FEATURE

No. 4
July–August

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Exclusive preview: Art Spiegelman/ Francoise Mouly's RAW magazine!

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Belated Credit:
Apologies to Frederick Marcus, who conducted the Boris Vallejo interview last issue, supplied the Boris watercolor from his collection, and photographed Boris, as well as David Michelinie and Bob Layton.

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OPENING NOTES

Editorial by Dean Mullaney

It's not often these days that I get excited about new comics, whether published by Marvel, DC, Warren, or other sources. It may be that I'm jaded, although I tend to think not. Or, it may be that over the years I've come to expect more from my comics than run-of-the-mill stories and art. While I do not intend to use this space to plug certain ventures and ignore others, two items I've seen recently have so excited me that I'd like to tell you about them.

The first is *Gen of Hiroshima*, by Japanese cartoonist Keiji Nakazawa, which Cat Yronwode turned me on to with her review of Educomics' 32-pager in our second issue. I read the 32 pages and immediately fell in love with the lead character, little Gen, his family, and with what Nakazawa was trying to say. The only problem with the comic is that it is part of an 1100 page epic, which Nakazawa continues at this date. Would I be dead by the time the entire story was reprinted from the original Japanese? 32 into 1100 pages goes a hell of a long way.

Luckily, when visiting Art Spiegelman to conduct this issue's interview, Art showed me two over-sized paperback collections of *Gen of Hiroshima*, published and translated by Project Gen in Japan, and distributed through the War Resisters League in New York. The volumes are entitled *Barefoot Gen*, and the first volume is 284 pages, the second 341. That's 625 pages of *Barefoot Gen*, approximately half the story. And the amazing part about it is that the books sell for only $4.00 each! Eight bucks and you get 625 pages of one of the most gripping, emotional and morally exciting stories I think has ever been published.

If you recall Cat's review, the story concerns little Gen and his family living in Hiroshima during World War II, and the hardships suffered by the Japanese people in general, and Gen's father, a pacifist, in particular. The first volume concludes with the dropping of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima. The story is autobiograhical, as Nakazawa himself lived in Hiroshima, and survived.

Unlike the Educomics version, these books have not been "Americanized" (i.e., not zip-a-toned to make them seem like American comics), nor has the lettering been done with much grace. However, the story is what is important and so-so lettering or not, the story is what counts.

I cannot tell you what the second volume entails. I just finished reading volume one and am too emotionally upset to approach the second volume. I am not ashamed to admit that tears are rolling down my cheeks and that there's an uneasy feeling in my stomach. In fact I cannot imagine anyone reading this story not reacting in a similar fashion. Nakazawa is a consummate storyteller and the story he has to tell is important.

Whatever your political beliefs, *Barefoot Gen*, or the 32-page *Gen of Hiroshima* is something I don't think you should pass up. The two volumes are available from The War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10012. The price, as I mentioned, is $4.00 per volume plus 81¢ postage. Project Gen is a non-profit organization, which is why they can sell the books so cheaply.

The second comic, or magazine, that I have to recommend is Art Spiegelman's own *Raw*, which he and his co-editor Francoise Mouly, discuss in this issue's interview.

I have been an admirer of Spiegelman's work for many years and have followed his cartoons from the undergrounds to *Arcade* to his recent collection, *Breakdowns*. Spiegelman has always been in the vanguard of the medium and with *Raw*, he and Ms. Mouly have not only broken new ground, they've caused a major earthquake. *Raw* is simply the hottest magazine I've seen in years and I invite all of you to read closely the interview with Spiegelman and Mouly. Whether or not *Raw* is a huge commercial success, I think we will be witnessing a major event in the history of the medium with its release.

So get your money together, folks, this stuff ain't like nothin' you've seen before.

—Dean Mullaney

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HEADLINES

HEAVY METAL BREAKS WITH FRENCH SOURCE

Heavy Metal has severed all connections with *Metal Hurlant*, the French magazine from which it has drawn much of its material. This break comes as a result of the recent bankruptcy of Les Humanoids Associates, the company which published *Metal Hurlant*, and in which Moebius and Druillet, whose work often appears in *Heavy Metal*, along with two others, were partners. *Metal Hurlant* is now owned by its principal creditor, the Spanish printing firm Litho Print.

The bankruptcy ended the existing contract between *Metal Hurlant* and *Heavy Metal*, and, according to *Heavy Metal* editor Ted White, the new terms *Hurlant* wanted were "unacceptable." White asserts that those terms would have "made *Heavy Metal* into a virtual reprint of" *Metal Hurlant*, and that he does not feel all of *Hurlant*'s material is up to *Heavy Metal*'s standards. "*Metal Hurlant* is very uneven," says White, "with much totally unsuitable material."

As a result, *Heavy Metal* will no longer print material from *Metal Hurlant*, but White says he doubts that "the average American reader will notice" the change "to any degree." He notes that *Heavy Metal* "was becoming less and less an American edition of*Metal Hurlant*" and in fact "half the French material" *Heavy Metal* has now been running is from *Hurl ant*'s competitor *Pilote*. Since Druillet has had material in *Pilote*, his work will continue to appear in *Heavy Metal*. White says that *Heavy Metal* will try to get Moebius to do work directly for them. The end of the *Hurlant* connection, however, will "not necessarily grossly increase" the amount of American material in *Heavy Metal*. The last of the *Hurlant* material will appear in October's "rock" issue.

Independently of *Heavy Metal*, White will collaborate with Mike Kaluta on a graphic novel on an as yet undisclosed subject.

Heavy Metal's September issue features the conclusion on "The Alchemist Supreme" by Godard and Ribera, an interview with Druillet, part three of "Progress!" by Bilal, part two of Druillet's "Salammbo," the next installments of Matt Howarth's "Changes" and "Professor Thintwhistle" by Lupoff and Stiles, "Zeitgeist" by Greg Terpenning and Ernie Colon, "Shaman" by Paul Kirchner, and "Into the Breach" by Leo Duranona and John Shirley.

—P.S.

DC-MARVEL TEAM—UPS

Over the next several years DC and Marvel will be doing four books in which heroes from both companies meet for joint adventures. The first of these will be a new Superman-Spider-Man team-up book, produced by Marvel, written by Jim Shooter with art by John Buscema and Joe Sinnott. Background inkers will include Terry Austin, Walt Simonson, Al Milgrom, Joe Rubinstein, Bob Wiacek and Bob McLeod. Wonder Woman and the Hulk will make guest appearances, and the villains will be Dr. Doom and the Parasite. The story will go on sale January 20 in two formats: a 64-page Treasury edition and a 160-page paperback published by Warner Books. Originally the team-up was to go on sale this summer, and then in October, but producing the paperback version required more lead time. Shooter assures students of continuity that it will be made clear somewhere in the story that it is not taking place on Marvel-Earth but in an alternate reality in which the DC and Marvel heroes both exist.

The second book stars the Batman and the Hulk and will be produced by DC. This time Captain America and Wonder Woman will make guest shots. Len Wein will write the story, Jose Luis Garcia Lopez will pencil, and either Dick Giordano or Garcia Lopez will ink.

Marvel produces the third book, in which the X-Men meet the Legion of Super-Heroes. Plans are for Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum to do the book.

The fourth book will be handled by DC, and pairs the Justice League of America with the Avengers. No creative team has been chosen as yet.

The books will appear on a yearly schedule, although, due to the delays on the first book, two may end up coming out the same year.

DAREDEVIL ESCAPES CODE HASSLE

To avoid problems with the Comics Code Authority, the upcoming *Daredevil* story dealing with the dangerous drug TCD, popularly known as "angel dust," will be published as the first of Marvel's books designed for and distributed in comics specialty shops but not newsstands as well. Two other stories, one with art by Frank Springer, will be used in *Daredevil* 167 and 168, where the "angel dust" story was originally intended to appear, instead.

The Comics Code Authority had rejected the first half of the "angel dust" story due to a sequence in which a teenage boy is shown smoking the substance in a pipe. This sequence, the Code stated, violated the rules against showing minors actually taking drugs (a rule passed in reaction to the celebrated *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* story of ten years ago) and against showing exactly how a crime (in this case using an illegal drug) is committed.

Daredevil editor Denny O'Neil says that the sequence was put in the story in order to "ensure credibility" with readers who know about using such drugs, and whom the story was intended to discourage from doing so. The scene was designed to convince readers that the people working on the story knew what they were talking about on the subject of drugs, and therefore, by extension, could be believed when they condemn using such drugs in the course of the story. We "want to show graphically it's real rotten stuff," comments O'Neil.

Three different versions of the scene were done, in fact. There was a "softer" one than the Code saw, done in silhouette, and a "harder" one, in which the pipe is drawn more like the ones actually used in taking "angel dust."

Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, who considers the story "brilliant," says that "while we feel the story should be told," he and James Galton, the president of Cadence Publishing, which owns Marvel, felt that the Code had a reasonable point of view on the subject and that he and Galton did not want to "compromise the Code." Therefore, Shooter suggested that the story be done as a specialty shops book and Galton "supported it wholeheartedly."

Ironically enough, although all the parties at Marvel concerned believe the story will serve an important educative purpose in persuading people not to use dangerous drugs, the drug problem is not the main topic of the story. The tale's principal theme is, as stated in last issue's news column, the conflict between the view that criminals should be punished according to the law and the view that they have forfeited their rights and should be hunted down in vigilante fashion and killed. Daredevil represents the former point of view and the Punisher the latter; it just so happens that the criminals they are pursuing in this story are drug dealers. —P.S.

Headlines

WOLFMAN'S UPCOMING NOVELS

Marv Wolfman has been working on two writing projects outside mainstream comics. One of them, which he hopes to do for New Media/Irjax, is a 20,000 word prose novel in which Dracula meets Jack the Ripper. Paul Gulacy will provide ten to twelve illustrations for the novel. Wolfman had originally intended to do the story in comics form for Marvel's *Tomb of Dracula* magazine as one of a series of tales set in different time periods in which Dracula encountered various celebrated historical or fictional characters. When he left Marvel, Wolfman had nearly finished securing the rights to do a one-shot story for *Tomb* set in the 1930s, to be drawn by Gene Colan, in which Dracula met the Shadow. Such a story, by the way, would have made the Shadow the first hero to have counterparts in both the mainstream DC and Marvel universes.

Wolfman built the Ripper story around the fact that the events described in Bram Stoker's original *Dracula* novel can be established to have taken place sometime within a five year time span. One of those years was the same one during which Jack the Ripper committed his murders. Moreover, the date (month and day) Stoker gives, for Dracula's arrival in London is the same as that of the Ripper's first crime, and the Ripper's last is on the date (month and day) one day after Dracula's seeming destruction, as presented by Stoker. Wolfman's book proceeds on the premise that all of these events took place within the very same year.

Wolfman is also doing a projected series of four novels in comics form for Flying Buttress Publications which will be drawn by George Perez, his collaborator on *The New Teen Titans*. The central character is named Janus and is the son of Asmodeus, the ruler of hell, and a mortal woman. The series is set on an Earth that looks exactly like our own, but in which nothing that works along scientific principles functions any longer: only sorcery works now. Janus comes to Earth, takes over the body of a murdered Greenwich Village jazz musician named Jason, and works to thwart Asmodeus's attempts to conquer Earth. The first book will have a 44-page story and will appear at the end of this year or the beginning of next. If successful, the other three books in the series will follow at yearly intervals. Either Perez himself or Gene Day will ink the first book.

As for Wolfman's DC comics series, in the first issue of *The New Teen Titans*, the heroes will battle members of one of the new alien races he has created for his DC stories. Issue three introduces a new group of super-villains, the Fearsome Five, led by Dr. Light. The other members are Shimmer, who can transmute matter, the super-strong Mammoth, a mechanical expert named Gizmo, and Psimon, who possesses telepathic and telekinetic powers. Dr. Light plans to defeat the Titans and then use them to defeat his real enemies, the Justice League. One of the new Titans, Raven, comes to believe that if they do not beat the JLA, a powerful menace will be unleashed. The Justice League shows up in issue 4, followed by the mysterious menace in 5.

Wolfman plans to use primarily new villains for the Titans, but while he probably will not use old Titans villains, he does plan to bring in villains from *Blackhawk*, *Challengers of the Unknown*, notably Multi-Man, who will be handled as he originally was, and *The Doom Patrol*, including General Immortus and the Brotherhood of Evil, possibly including its other original members Monsieur Mallah and the Brain. The presence of the Changeling, who was formerly Beast Boy of *The Doom Patrol*, facilitates the appearance of other characters from the old series in *Teen Titans*, so after the first year of stories his adoptive father Mento, Madame Rouge, who murdered the original Doom Patrol, and possibly Robotman may show up.

Wolfman will be giving up *Batman* to do *Dial 'H'*, but before he does, he will introduce a new villain, the Electrocutioner, and do a four-part story featuring Ra's al Ghul. The adventure will have the Batman allowing Talia to stay in the Batcave, thereby infuriating Robin, while he goes on a mission that will take him around the world. The Batman will even attempt to get into Hong Kong from Communist China basically using methods that have been used by people who have done it in real life. Meanwhile, Robin and the Catwoman will be travelling to the same destination as the Batman, but by a different route. The tale will also introduce Ra's al Ghul's new headquarters, an island in the Indian Ocean whose two dormant volcanoes make it look like a giant infinity sign.

After Wolfman's first *Superman* issue, he and Cary Bates will switch magazines so that Wolfman's Superman stories will appear in *Action* from then on. Bates will still handle the TV station, and Wolfman the Daily Planet, and Wolfman plans to put the Daily Planet Globe back atop the Galaxy (formerly the Daily Planet) Building. In one upcoming Wolfman story Superman must break into his own Fortress of Solitude, which has been taken over by Brainiac. A two-part story will have Superman waking up to find Vandal Savage to be the ruler of Earth, Luthor as Savage's leading scientist, Jimmy Olsen as a revolutionary out to kill Savage, and other such oddities—and not finding anything at all unusual about any of it.

Green Lantern will embark on a long, multi-part time travel adventure that begins with Eclipso wreaking havoc at Ferris Aircraft. Just as Eclipso is about to kill Green Lantern's friend Thomas Kalmuku, the hero will be teleported through time by his friends from the distant future, Chairman Dasor and Iona Vane, who are under attack by the descendants of the aliens from *New Teen Titans #1*. On his way to Dasor's time, Green Lantern gets stuck in Space Ranger's era, where another generation of those aliens are attacking. Just as Green Lantern figures out how to defeat the aliens , he is teleported to Dasor's time period where, unfortunately, due to Dasor's time travel methods, he loses his memory.

Eventually Green Lantern will undertake a search for Carol Ferris, who will be kidnapped in Wolfman's second issue, Ferris Aircraft will relocate to Los Angeles, and Carol and Hal Jordan will move into a house together. —P.S.

JOHNNY CARSON DEBUTS NEW COMIC BOOKS

On the May 27th *Tonight Show*, Johnny Carson and Ed McMahon introduced some new comic books as the punch line of one of their classic routines.

After mentioning that the first Superman comic from 1938 sells for $4,000 (!), Carson held up a number of comics, including *Wonder Woman*, *Spider Woman*, *Captain America*, *The Incredible Hulk* ("because of the TV show"!), *The Silver Surfer*, *Moon Knight* ("strikes fear into aliens by mooning them") and *Sea Devils* (!).

Following McMahon's obligatory "every comic book you ever wanted to know about is in this stack," Carson introduced the following new comics: *Obsceno*, *Caller of Criminals*, *Medical Man* (defeats his enemies by having them fill specimen jars), *Illegal Alien Man*, *The Gay Hornet*, and *Havana Man* (a super dictator who can't fly, can't bend steel with his bare hands and can't leap buildings in a single bound, but at the snap of his fingers can triple the population of Miami) among others.

So tell me, Johnny, where can I get an *Action* #1 for only $4,000?

—D.M.

Headlines

TALES OF ASGARD RETURNS

Tales of Asgard will return as a backup feature in *Thor* when Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio become the regular writers of the book in the near future. *Tales of Asgard* was the regular backup series for much of the time that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby collaborated on the book. Back then, the lead feature, *Thor* itself, was 16 pages long and *Tales of Asgard* took up five pages. With Marvel's new story page increase, Gruenwald and Macchio will return to the old format, with the difference that now the *Thor* story will be 17 pages, a page longer than in the old days, while *Tales* remains at 5 pages.

The new *Tales of Asgard* will be set in the present day, and consist of three-part stories involving characters who turn up briefly in the main feature in at least one of the same issues in which that particular *Tales* story runs. The first three- part *Tales* concerns a revived Balder and Karnilla, and the second involves Loki and his wife Sigyn.

As for Thor's own stories, Gruenwald and Macchio want to do adventures set on Earth for at least a year, and to pit Thor against villains, both old and new, whom he has never fought before. Gruenwald promises that as long as he and Macchio are on the book, they will avoid what they regard as the overused *Thor* plot formulas: "no quests, no take-overs of Asgard, no Destroyer, no Odinsword, no Mangog, no Loki as main villain, although Loki will still be around, no Ragnarok, no banishments of

NEW GERBER CREATION ON ABC

Thundarr the Barbarian, a new science fiction/fantasy cartoon series co-created by Steve Gerber and Joe Ruby will premiere on Saturday mornings this fall on ABC. The series, which beat out stiff competition from *Spider-Man* and *Daredevil* for the half-hour spot on ABC, was designed by former comic book artists Alex Toth and Jack Kirby.

Gerber, creator of *Howard the Duck* and currently a story editor for Ruby-Spears Productions, the producers of the series, will be scripting several of the thirteen episodes. Other scripts are being written by Buzz Dixon, Mark Evanier, and Martin Pasko. Joe Ruby is also known as the co-creator of *Scooby-Doo*,one of television's most successful animated series.

According to Gerber, "We've done the best we can to produce a real adventure show, even under the restrictions of Saturday morning, and although we've had to compromise in certain instances,I think we've succeeded. If the animation is as good as the scripts have been, I think *Thundarr* will be the most exciting series —visually and in terms of content—on Saturday morning this fall."

Because of *Thor*, Gruenwald and Macchio are giving up *Marvel Two-In-One*, which Tom DeFalco takes over with issue 77.

Thor from Asgard and no searches to find Odin.'' Gruenwald comments that "It's one of my favorite books and I hope to write it for years."

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BUT EARTH HAS THIN CLAIMPOINT UNLIKE ANY OTHER WORLD WE HAVE VISITED, AND THE CELESTIALS ARE NOW PLANNING TO BE RECORD DECIDED HERE, AND ITS HERE ON A GOD-DAMN PERSONAL PLAN, THE FATE OF EARTH WILL IN MOMENTS BE KNOWN!
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MORE COMICS TO BE FILMS

Dino DeLaurentiis has just taken out movie options on two Marvel characters, the Ghost Rider and the Man-Wolf.

Will Eisner's and S. M. Iger's character Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, will be the star of a movie to be filmed next year for Columbia.

There have been preview screenings of twenty-six minutes worth of excerpts from the live action *Popeye* movie in New York, Chicago and Dallas. The movie, directed by Robert Altman, is scheduled for December release. Its producer, Robert Evans, calls the film "a celebration of the individual." Cartoonist Jules Feiffer, who wrote the screenplay, told *Parade* magazine (May 18, 1980) that "What the film really turns out to be is a little romance about two people who fight all the time. They live in a society where everyone is corrupt except themselves—so the movie is also about family, trust and betrayal. But by the end of the picture, Olive, Popeye and his archenemy Bluto have arrived at a way of dealing with one another. They recognize that while nothing is perfect, they haven't anything better. They have no other choice but to get along."

The *Conan* movie is scheduled to begin its thirty week shooting schedule on January 12. Filming will be done in Yugoslavia, Spain and England. Arnold Schwartzenegger is still playing the title role, John Milius will direct and Milius and Oliver Stone wrote the screenplay. The film is a Dino DeLaurentiis presentation and will be distributed in the United States by Universal. Executive producer Edward Pressman hopes that it will be the first of a series of *Conan* films.

I Go Pogo is the title of the ninety-minute stop-motion animated film based on Walt Kelly's *Pogo* comic strip scheduled for release this summer.

Filming begins this year on a *Shadow* movie for Universal, which also has the option of doing a *Shadow* television series.

Marvel writers have been doing treatments for possible movies of various existing Marvel characters and, in one case, a wholly new concept. Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter declares that Marvel has an "incredible talent pool" with "some of the best story people in the world," who are fully capable of doing "more than comics, any kind of stories." He states that he has "been lobbying for the regular people at Marvel to do as much of the creative work as possible" when Marvel is working on a movie or television deal. One beneficial result would be that a treatment of a character done by a Marvel writer, Shooter notes, would stay closer to his handling in Marvel's own books than an outside writer's might. Several people at Marvel have already produced treatments for possible films, mostly of Marvel characters, but also at least one "original concept," which was not described, although none of these projects has as yet reached fruition. Denny O'Neil has done a treatment of Daredevil, and Shooter himself has done two, one of them on the Dazzler.

READERS DIAL 'H' FOR HEROES

DC will inaugurate an experiment in reader participation with its revival of *Dial 'H' for Hero*, to be edited by Jack C. Harris and written by Marv Wolfman, which debuts in *Adventure Comics* 481. The revamped series centers on a boy and girl who are high school freshmen and who discover "mystic dials" which can turn them into various superheroes. Readers are being asked to submit ideas for the superheroes (their names, powers and costumes), the villains, story situations, and even the clothes the heroes wear in their everyday identities and the furniture and layouts of their rooms. Readers who send in ideas must also sign a release form stipulating that the concepts "become, upon submission, the exclusive property of DC Comics, and that DC owns all rights, including copyright throughout the world, in and to the work (which has been specially commissioned as a 'work made for hire' under the U.S. copyright law), and DC can use and authorize the use of the work in any way, without further compensation to" the reader in question. Any reader whose idea is used will receive a credit line in the panel in which his concept is first used (in which, for example, the hero he created first appears), and will receive a "Dial 'H' for Hero" T-shirt in recompense. Major changes in a reader's idea (such as changing a male hero into a female one, as has already happened in one case) will not be made without consulting the reader.

Originally Len Wein and Marv Wolfman thought of bringing back Robby Reed, the star of the original *Dial 'H'* series of the 1960s as a member of the new Teen Titans. Then DC publisher Jenette Kahn proposed a series with a hero and heroine who would turn into different superheroes based on reader suggestions, whereupon Wein thought of tying this idea in with the original *Dial 'H'* concept.

Each issue will contain three eight-page stories, each probably done by a different penciller. In this way, a good number of reader suggestions can be utilized in each issue. Partly because of the limitations on the length of each tale, there will be no menaces that, for example, would threaten the entire world. Although Marv Wolfman looks upon *Dial 'H'* as a "wish-fulfillment book" for readers, he stresses that it will be done seriously and not "geared down" to younger readers. In fact, he says, Kahn has given him permission to do "very realistic" stories in the book, and even a drug story if he so wishes. However, although Wolfman may use realistic themes, he says his treatment of them will never become "heavy."

The central characters will be fellow students, fourteen or fifteen years old. The boy is the son of a policeman and according to Wolfman is a "very shy, very quiet, average student" who "likes to draw." The girl, in contrast, is very popular and outgoing. Their names have not yet been chosen. Wolfman thinks that because the readers will be sending in their ideas for the characters' wardrobe and furnishings for their rooms, the series will have "more responsive to current trends" than other comics, and says that as trends change in real life, so too will the fashions on view in *Dial 'H'*.

CHANGES AND CANCELLATIONS

Machine Man and *Battlestar Galactica* are being cancelled with issues 19 and 23, respectively. Also, *Marvel Fun & Games* ceases publication with issue 13, and four of the reprint books are being dropped: *Amazing Adventures* (the original X-Men) with issue 14, *Fantasy Masterpieces* (the Silver Surfer) with #14, *Marvel's Greatest Comics* (the Fantastic Four) with #96, and *Tales to Astonish* (the Sub-Mariner) with #14.

In their place, *Daredevil* will go monthly after issue 170, and *Power Man/Iron Fist* goes monthly after issue 68. To help *Daredevil* penciller Frank Miller get ahead with this new work load, three of the first monthly issues will contain a backup feature written by Larry Hama and drawn by Walt Simonson, the nature of which is still being kept secret.

Also, work is continuing on a new *Sub-Mariner* book by Jim Shooter and Alan Weiss.

Chris Claremont takes over the writing of *Spider-Woman* with issue 35. Not unexpectedly, the X-Men will guest star in one of his first issues. Claremont continues on *Man-Thing*, which was quickly reinstated on the schedule after being cancelled in May. However, Roger Stern will again assume the writing chores on *Doctor Strange*, probably with issue 46.

Headlines

WARNERS CARTOON STUDIO REBORN

Warner Brothers has again formed its animated cartoon studio, which was shut down in 1963. Senior executive producer is Fritz Freleng, now 79, the director of such cartoons as the Bugs Bunny versus Yosemite Sam and the Tweety and Sylvester series. Freleng's first animated feature will be *The Second Bugs Bunny Movie*, which will apparently be a showcase of his past work just as 1979's *The Bugs Bunny-Road Runner Movie* was for its director, Chuck Jones. Until now, all animation involving the Warners cartoon characters over the last seventeen years had been done by other animation studios, most notably Jones's own. Jones's most recent work has been a half hour television special with all new animation, *Bugs Bunny is Busting Out All Over*, which debuted in May and featured a new Roadrunner cartoon.

Warners' new cartoons will be done in full animation (with the entire figure redrawn for each frame rather than just part of it), despite the fact that it can cost $25,000 per minute of film as compared to $6,000 for "semi-animation." According to *Variety* (May. 21, 1980), Warner Brothers Television East Coast executive vice president Ed Bleier stated that "The cost is what has kept the networks doing semi-animation, but Bugs Bunny, Sylvester and Yosemite Sam wouldn't be the same without full animation." Moreover, whether or not movie theatres want cartoons, Warners will still do them "for the timelessness [of the art] and to train others."

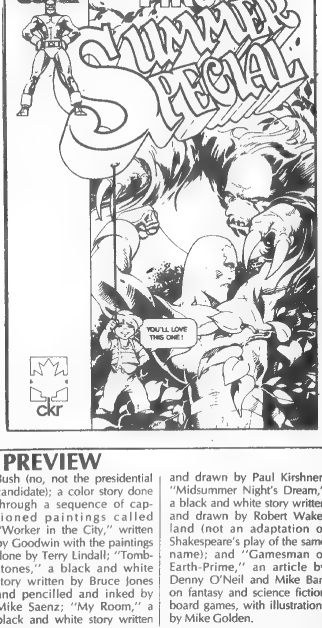
Until March 15, when his partnership with David H. De Patie dissolved, Freleng had been one of the heads of De Patie-Freleng Enterprises, which produced the most recent *Fantastic Four* animated TV series, as well as the *Pink Panther* cartoons seen on Saturday mornings.

Meanwhile, the same issue of *Variety* reports that the Disney Studios have set the goal of working on two animated features at once. Joe Hale, who has worked in animation and special effects, most recently in *The Black Hole*, for Disney for thirty years, is now Disney's animation producer.

CAPTAIN CANUCK GETS SUMMER SPECIAL

Captain Canuck, the first major Canadian superhero comic book, has now gained newsstand distribution in the U.S., in addition to Canada. CKR Productions, who publish the comic, have also announced their first summer special. The special will be 68 pages, with 58 of those story material, and will retail for 95¢. In addition to a 27 page Captain Canuck story, the special will contain: Redcoat & Kebec, a second Captain Canuck adventure, two shorter stories, a portfolio of the Captain by other artists, and "The Filler," a humorous strip which sounds reminiscent of the humorous "behind-the-scenes" shorts in early Marvel annuals.

Guest contributors in the special are: Gene Day, Vern Andrusiek, Peter Dawes, Dave Sim and Tom Grummett.



WARP REVIVED IN CHICAGO

Warp, heralded as "the world's first science-fiction epic adventure play," has been revived by Group One Associates and will be playing at the Apollo Theater Center in Chicago this month.

The play, which opened in Chicago in 1971 and later moved to Broadway, has set and costume designs by Neal Adams, for which he won a Drama Desk award in 1971.

The three part play will be presented as follows: Episode One, "My Battlefield, My Body," runs June 25 through July 15; Episode Two, "Unleashed, Unchained," runs July 16 through July 29; Episode Three, "To Die...Alive," begins July 30. All three episodes will be presented on three consecutive nights following the third episode.

EPIC 3 PREVIEW

The third issue of Marvel's *Epic Illustrated* will have a cover by Paul Gulacy and include the first of two excerpts from Marvel's forthcoming adaptation of Michael Moorcock's Elric story "The Dreaming City" by Roy Thomas and Craig Russell, in color; two more chapters of Jim Starlin's *Metamorphosis Odyssey* in color, "Vanth," who will be the central character in the specialty shops book Starlin will do for Marvel, and "The Meeting"; "Libido," by Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy, in black and white; the second part of Robert E. Howard's *Almuric* by Roy Thomas and Tim Conrad, in color; "Forest Magic," an illustrated fiction piece by Archie Goodwin with color illustrations by George Bush (no, not the presidential candidate); a color story done through a sequence of captioned paintings called "Worker in the City," written by Goodwin with the paintings done by Terry Lindall; "Tombstones," a black and white story written by Bruce Jones and pencilled and inked by Mike Saenz; "My Room," a black and white story written and drawn by Paul Kirshner; "Midsummer Night's Dream," a black and white story written and drawn by Robert Wakeland (not an adaptation of Shakespeare's play of the same name); and "Gamesman of Earth-Prime," an article by Denny O'Neil and Mike Barr on fantasy and science fiction board games, with illustrations by Mike Golden.

Short Subjects

DC

- The Golden Age Green Lantern and his nemeses the Harlequin and the Sportsmaster will guest star in an upcoming *Mr. and Mrs. Superman* story.
- Power Girl teams up with the Huntress in backup stories by Paul Levitz and Joe Staton in *Wonder Woman* 274-276.
- Jim Starlin is pencilling a three-part *Firestorm* backup story for *Flash* 294-296 as well as covers for *Mystery in Space* 117 and *Superman* 355.
- Steve Ditko has pencilled a 25-page story for *Legion of Super-Heroes* 272 which recounts the origin of a new Legionnaire. In upcoming issues the Legion will choose a new leader and the storyline about the murder Brainiac 5 committed will be resolved. The three-part mini-series *Secrets of the Legion of Super-Heroes*, pencilled by Jimmy Janes, plotted by E. Nelson Bridwell and scripted by Paul Kupperberg, will go on sale in October, November and December.
- John Severin will be doing three *Enemy Ace* stories for *Unknown Soldier*.
- Mike Golden has pencilled a story for *Mystery in Space* 113 and British artist Brian Bolland's first story in this country appears in 115.
- After a two-part story in *Warlord* 40-41, the *Wizard World* series will be temporarily suspended to give Mike Grell more time to work on the book's lead feature. *Omac* will return as the backup. Bob Smith will ink *Warlord* in issue 41.
- The Fatal Five returns with a sixth member, their new leader, in *Legion of Super-Heroes* 269.
- A new origin story for the Penguin appears in an upcoming *Secret Origins of Super-Villains* Digest Comic.
- Johnny Thunder's Thunderbolt visits *Mr. and Mrs. Superman* in *Superman Family* 204. Another upcoming story in this series features the Golden Age Green Lantern and his nemeses the Harlequin and the Sportsmaster.
- It is said that Carmine Infantino will again be drawing *Flash* and *Adam Strange* for DC. The first of his *Adam Strange* stories will be inked by Murphy Anderson. Infantino's first new DC work to appear will be a Batman–Deadman team-up for *Detective* 500 (which will sell for $1.50) and an upcoming short story for *Mystery in Space*

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GENERAL

- **Toxic Flange** is a new comics magazine with an underground flavor, by Mark Fisher and Andy Poyner. It's 24 pages plus a slick cover, and is $2.00 postpaid from Poyner Graphics, Box 151, M.I.T. Branch, Cambridge, MA 02139.
- Rip Off Press has a new series of postcards featuring the likes of Zippy the Pinhead, the Freak Bros., Fat Freddy's Cat, Wonder Wart-Hog, and others. Rip Off has also released two new paperbacks: *The New Adventures of Jesus* by Foolbert Sturgeon (Frank Stack) and *The Cartoon History of the Universe* by Larry Gonick. The former is 96 pp., the latter 112 pp.
- Quartuccio Productions' long-delayed book *The Art of John Byrne* finally went on sale in early June. The book includes a wordless 25-page comics story by Byrne entitled "Critical Error," an interview with Byrne done last summer, over forty illustrations, a checklist of Byrne's fan and professional work, and commentaries by Chris Claremont, Roger Stern and Terry Austin.
- Richard Howell and Carol Kalish are editing and publishing a new quarterly fanzine, *Artform*, which will deal with the aesthetics of the comics medium. The first issue, which will appear this fall, features a symposium on the recurring question of whether comics can be art, led off by an essay on the subject by COMICS FEATURE associate editor Peter Sanderson, an essay on the presentation of evil in mainstream comic books by

Short Subjects

Margaret O'Connell, and a series of reviews. Howell and Kalish's comic strip reprint magazine, *Chapters*, began publishing in early June, and will add V.T. Hamlin's *Alley Oop* to its lineup, starting from its beginning, in issue 3.

- Wendy and Richard Pini will be writing three novelizations of their *Elfquest* comics series for Playboy Press Enterprises. The first novel, due out in time for Christmas of 1981, covers the first five issues, and will have color covers and twelve black-and-white plates done by Wendy Pini. She says that the novel will be "just like the comic" but will provide "much greater detail and more background" for the characters and their lives. The second novel will cover issues 6 through 10, and the third issues 11 through 15. With issue 15, scheduled for print two and a half years from now, the *Elfquest* comics series will come to its end.

Negotiations continue between Wendy and Richard Pini and a New York animation firm over the prospect of an *Elfquest* film.

Now from Ace, with a Boris cover.

MARVEL

- The Hulk meets and fights Thor in *Hulk* 255. After that, the Hulk will spend the next several issues journeying around the world. In the process he will probably meet some of the foreign superheroes who were created for the Marvel Summer Olympics book, which is still in limbo. The Hulk's first stop will be Israel, in 256, where he will encounter one of them, the Israeli superheroine Sabra.
- Tom Palmer inks this year's *Amazing Spider-Man Annual*, which is written by Denny O'Neil and penciled by Frank Miller, and pits Spider-Man and Dr. Strange against Dormammu and a henchman of Dr. Doom's. Doom also makes an appearance as does the real-life rock group Shrapnel
- Nick Fury's nemesis Baron Strucker tangles with Dominic Fortune in issue 23 of *The Hulk* magazine. There will only be six *Dominic Fortune* stories altogether in *The Hulk*; the next backup series has yet to be chosen. Meanwhile, modern day Fury enemies Mentallo and the Fixer turn up in *Micronauts* 24 along with forces from both SHIELD and Hydra.
- The Jack of Hearts returns in *Rom* 12.
- *Power Man/Iron Fist* 66 will have its title heroes aiding Misty Knight and Colleen Wing against Bushmaster and the Constrictor. The Hispanic swashbuckler El Aguila returns in 65, and Bushmaster in 67.
- A new Prowler will be introduced in a two-part story in *Spectacular Spider-Man* 47-48, which will also resolve the Belladonna storyline. Another new villain, the Smuggler, emerges in 49, while an old-time Spider-Man archenemy makes a surprise appearance in 50 and 51. Issues 49 through 51 will also feature a backup series with the White Tiger, written by Roger Stern, pencilled by Dennis Cohen and probably inked by Joe Rubinstein, which leads to a book-length team-up of Spider-Man and the White Tiger in issue 52. Also, Aunt May has an engagement party in issue 50.

- Tom DeFalco becomes the regular writer of *Marvel Team-Up* with issue 103.
- Archie Goodwin will leave *Star Wars* after the completion of its six-part adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back*, although he may still do occasional stories for it.
- *Sgt. Fury* will receive two all-new issues of *Marvel Spotlight* drawn by Herb Trimpe. If these are successful, the regular *Sgt. Fury* book may shift from reprints to new material.
- The final issues of *Tales to Astonish* and *Marvel's Greatest Comics* will run Hulk and possibly Nick Fury-SHIELD stories that were done for Marvel's British books and have yet to appear in this country.
- The "female adventurers" issue of *Marvel Preview*, number 24, features a cover by Paul Gulacy and introduces Mike Golden's *Lady Daemon* about a woman with mystical powers in the year 1938. *Lady Daemon* may become *The Hulk* magazine's backup feature after the last *Dominic Fortune*. A full-length *Kull* story by Doug Moench occupies issue 25.
- *Cerebus the Aardvark*'s Dave Sim did the frontispiece for *Howard the Duck* 8.
- Although David Michelinie will continue to script *The Avengers*, after the upcoming Ultron story each issue will be plotted by a committee consisting of Jim Shooter, Mark Gruenwald, Ralph Macchio and *Avengers* editor and assistant editor Jim Salicrup and Bob Budiansky. Their first effort is a two-parter centering on the Yellow Claw which will finally reveal his origin.

The Many Alternate Fates of the Phoenix

The complete story behind the death of Jean Grey

by Peter Sanderson

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By now *X-Men* readers are well aware that Jean Grey, who was Marvel Girl in the original X-Men and Phoenix in the current group, committed suicide in last month's conclusion to the "Dark Phoenix" saga (issue 137). What readers may not know is that the "Dark Phoenix" storyline had been planned nearly two years ago, and that numerous possible conclusions had been considered and discarded. In fact, issue 137 was originally completely pencilled and scripted with an ending in which Jean Grey survived. The present conclusion, in which she dies, was substituted at the last minute. *Comics Feature* wishes to thank Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, *X-Men* penciller/co-plotter John Byrne and *X-Men* co-plotter/scripter Chris Claremont for allowing us to publish some of the artwork from the original ending in these pages.

To understand the course of events that led to the decision that Jean had to die in 137, we must look back to the decision to turn her into Phoenix in the first place. Len Wein and Dave Cockrum, the creators of the "new" *X-Men* series, wrote Jean out of the book in issue 94 along with all the other original X-Men except Scott Summers (Cyclops). When Chris Claremont began plotting the book, he asked Cockrum to bring her back in issue 97, but to make her look like "a young, sophisticated New York collegian" instead of retaining what Claremont terms her former "young middle-American Republican" look. Drawing her this new way made Cockrum enthusiastic about the character. He and Claremont decided to change her superheroic name (since "Marvel Girl" sounded too much like the "Ms. Marvel" character then being planned), to change her costume to give her a more striking appearance, and to upgrade her powers to make her comparable to the group's other female member, Storm.

Claremont says that he wanted to make Phoenix "a female analogue to Thor, Firelord and the Silver Surfer," and thus a heroine on a "cosmic" level of power. He and Cockrum intended that the more she used her power, the more she would become like a god. In fact, she would become a "power junkie," who enjoyed the rush of pleasure exercising her power would bring. This fact, Claremont says, would lead to some interesting storylines. If she used a great deal of her power before she had learned how to control that much of it, she might accidentally wreck havoc. Moreover, if she unleashed even more of this power before she was fully prepared to handle it, her passion for using her power might unbalance her mind as it eventually did in the "Dark Phoenix" serial. Therefore, the X-Men's mentor, Professor Xavier, would have to train her in the use of her powers. Shooter believes that the concept of the X-Men as a school for super-powered mutants is fundamental to the series' appeal, but Byrne and Claremont agree that the current X-Men do not need schooling since except for Colossus they had all been using their powers for years before the new team was formed. Claremont saw the training of Phoenix as a means of bringing back the "school" motif. Moreover, he envisioned creating situations in which Jean was caught between her need to use her powers to rescue the other X-Men, and her awareness of the dangers that using it could create.

When *X-Men* went monthly, Cockrum left the book and John Byrne took over. Byrne had and still has fundamental objections to Jean's Phoenix persona. "It's not that I don't like Jean Grey," he explains. "I have an abiding fondness for redheads, and have been in love with Jean since we first 'met,' about a million years ago when I was thirteen." Byrne saw Marvel Girl in the original series as a heroine who pulled her own weight in battle with the team (thereby contrasting, he points out, with Sue Storm of the Fantastic Four), without making a big deal out of the fact.

On the other hand, Byrne regards Phoenix as "too brassy, too loud, too hip and feministic," and hence not in keeping with the personality he feels was established for Jean in the "old" *X-Men* series. Claremont agrees that his treatment of Jean's personality differs from Stan Lee's and Jack Kirby's in the early issues, but says that Jean was becoming more assertive in the issues on which Roy Thomas and Neal Adams collaborated. Claremont says that he relates to the Jean Grey of the latter stories rather than the earlier ones. Besides, he continues, anyone who has been a superheroine for at least seven years of "Marvel-time" would naturally have become more assertive by now.

Byrne does not see why there should be another "strong female character" (in terms of both powers and personality) in the X-Men when they already have Storm. Claremont, on the other hand, attacks what he sees as a double standard in comics that decrees that "a superhero group can have an infinite number of

strong males, but not two strong females." Byrne argues that the male X-Men do not have equally assertive personalities, and contrasts Colossus and Nightcrawler with Wolverine.

As for strength as measured in terms of sheer power, Byrne believes that Phoenix was too powerful to be a number of a superhero group. She had, after all, saved the entire universe in issue 108. What would there be for the other X-Men to do in stories that had "Phoenix flexing a pinkie and putting everything back to rights while the others looked on?" Claremont argues that this is not at all an insurmountable problem. If Phoenix stayed in the book, she would stay on a Thor/Surfer power level rather than equalling or surpassing Galactus as she did in 135-137, and, Claremont points out, writers have been able to come up with effective adversaries even for the Surfer. Keeping Phoenix in the book would simply "require a better class of villain" for the X-Men, and "making the villains work for a change." A villain on the order of Proteus could be used, or villains could come up with means of draining her power, he contends. Moreover, "for all of her Phoenix-like ability, she was still heart and soul a twenty-four year old woman from upstate New York;" her effectiveness in battle would be limited by her amount of experience and her courage in facing horrifying adversaries. She could be fought through mental disorientation, Claremont says, or through psychic domination as in the Mesmero and Wyngarde stories, or through threatening her loved ones. He notes, too, she would be aware that to unleash too much power at the stage of her life and training would be to risk losing control of it and even turning into the evil Dark Phoenix. Byrne maintains, however, that as long as Phoenix was around, "the X-Men had become guest stars in their own book."

When Claremont decided to have the Beast and one of the X-Men get separated from the others at the finale of the Magneto story in 113, Byrne suggested it be Phoenix. As a result, Phoenix was out of the book for nine issues. Still, the problem of what to do with her had only been postponed, and as the time for her return approached, Byrne began losing interest in the book.

X-Men's editor also felt that Phoenix should not be a member of the team, and Claremont decided that he did not want to make Byrne "do a character he's uncomfortable with" and so "there's no sense in keeping her around." But then what would be done with her?

Marvel writer Steven Grant supplied the key by proposing that Phoenix become a villain. Claremont had already decided to bring in the Hellfire Club. Byrne suggested using Mastermind and having Jean psychically enthralled, whereupon Claremont decided to have him turn her into the decadent Black Queen. "Almost simultaneously," both co-plotters seized upon Grant's idea for the next plot development: Jean's psychological transformation into a villainess would be permanent, and the Black Queen would become the cosmic-powered Dark Phoenix.

But then what would happen to Dark Phoenix? Byrne and Claremont devised at least seven different scenarios, four of which were constructed over the course of three nights! Among them were the following.

Jean would lose her Phoenix powers and once again become Marvel Girl. The problem here was the same as the one that had arisen when Phoenix's power was limited during the Magneto story (112): it could not be agreed what level of power she should have.

Phoenix would be destroyed but then Jean would show up a few months later, without explanation. The characters would spend months wondering whether Jean would again turn on them, and eventually she would. Jean's eventual attack seemed too inevitable to create a real sense of mystery, and so this idea was rejected.

Professor Xavier would destroy Phoenix in their psychic battle, and the X-Men, horrified, would break up. Xavier would then form a new team, consisting entirely of children, who would wear the original X-Men uniforms. The first member would be Kitty Pryde, who would use "Ariel" as her superheroic name, and there would be four or five others, including one named Caliban, and possibly Willie Evans, Jr. from one of last year's *Fantastic Four* stories. The X-Men would reunite to battle some menace, and then remain together, but the children would continue to stay, receiving training from Xavier and sometimes accompanying their elders on missions. Again, this would be a way of restoring the "school" aspect to the series. However, the co-plotters feared that the children's team would turn into a "Legion of Substitute X-Men" and dismissed this idea. Kitty, of course, is still being used, and she will now probably be called "Sprite" (not to be confused with the Eternal of the same name).

Xavier would turn Jean's mind back to the level of a ten year old's. Since she had not yet developed her Marvel Girl powers at that age, the Phoenix would remain dormant, and Xavier would try to devise a way to control it. Meanwhile, Jean would in effect have been mentally retarded, and so she would be entrusted to the care of her sister. One day, however, she would wander off and be attacked by some would-be rapists. Her fear and anger would transform her back into Dark Phoenix, who would then somehow have to be disposed of permanently.

Xavier would seemingly destroy Phoenix in psychic combat, but because Phoenix is pure energy, which cannot be destroyed, she would one day rematerialize and team up with Magneto. Byrne, however, came to reject the idea of making Phoenix a recurring villain because she would be too powerful for the X-Men to beat. Both Byrne and Claremont felt more comfortable in permitting her to retain something of her heroic nature.

Phoenix would be destroyed and Scott would quit the X-Men for a time "to find out what had gone wrong with his life."

Finally Claremont and Byrne settled on a plot that became the original version of issue 137. It differs from the version that ultimately saw print at the point at which Scott and Jean alone are fighting off Lilandra's Imperial Guard. The two of them are defeated, and the scene shifts back to Lilandra's starship. Jean is placed (in a crucifixion position) atop a platform and is subjected to rays of energy that perform a "psychic lobotomy" on her. This is to say that the parts of her brain that make possible her psionic abilities are removed. So too are her aggressive drives, which make the Phoenix power work. When the "operation" is finished, all traces of Jean's super-

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powers have been removed; even her telepathic rapport with Scott has been destroyed. Her personality has changed too: she is now almost wholly passive. Lilandra tries to apologize to Scott for having had to do this to Jean to safeguard the universe, but Scott angrily snaps at her, "Haven't you done enough?", and carries Jean away, followed by the other X-Men. The Watcher and the Recorder offer some observations to the reader in the final two panels.

The next issue, 138, contained Scott's reminiscences about the history of the X-Men as he and Jean wandered through the woods near Professor Xavier's mansion. They then walk over to talk to the other X-Men, who are enjoying themselves in the swimming pool, and tell Xavier that they feel they have to go away for a while to come to terms with what has happened to them. Over the next several months, Jean would slowly regain her normal personality. As Scott and Jean drive away, Wolverine, who also loved Jean, turns away from the window with a tear in his eye. Finally, in the last panel, Kitty Pryde appears, ready to start her new life at Xavier's school.

Issues 137 and 138 had been completely pencilled, 137 entirely scripted, and all but one page of 137 lettered when the change in the Dark Phoenix denouement had to be made. Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter had been aware that Claremont and Byrne had continually been reworking Phoenix's fate, but he told Tom Salicrup, who was then *X-Men* editor, "As long as it's good, I don't care what it is, do it." When he said that, Shooter never expected that Dark Phoenix would end up destroying a planet inhabited by five billion people and a manned starship as well, thereby, in his words, becoming "the biggest mass murderer in history." Byrne claims credit for the idea of having Phoenix destroy an inhabited planet, although Claremont is not sure which of the two of them came up with it. Claremont says he thinks he had told Shooter about the planet being destroyed, but Shooter does not recall this. (The "asparagus people" that Dark Phoenix destroyed had previously appeared in *Avengers* 4, by the way.)

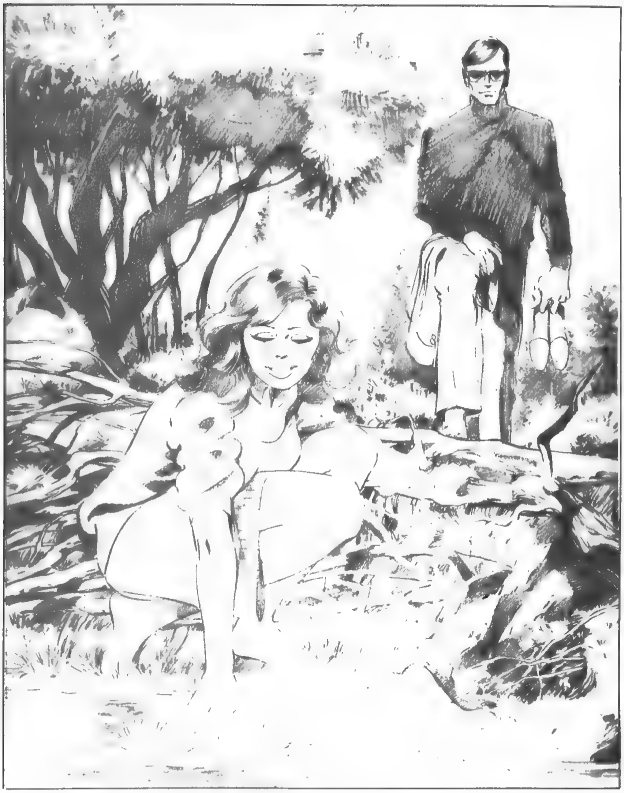
When Shooter saw the scene of the planet's destruction in the "make-ready" (a coverless copy that comes into the office a week or so before the book goes on sale) of issue 135, he asked to see the work for 136, which was already inked and lettered, and for 137, which had already been pencilled and nearly completely lettered. Shooter feels that the destruction of the inhabited planet was totally "gratuitous" but at that point it was too late to change 135, which had already been printed, and he did not want to strain the story's credibility by bringing the five billion "asparagus people" back from the dead somehow in a later issue. Since Jean had committed so horrific an act, Shooter believed that justice demanded that she pay the severest of penalties. The "psychic lobotomy," he decided, was insufficient

because, after it was done, Jean still retained her freedom and was not visibly suffering. Shooter decided that 137's ending had to be changed and that Jean either had to die or suffer a "fate worse than death," in other words, a "technological hell" that would serve as her prison. Possibly, Shooter thought, she could eventually escape from the space prison, but then she would have to be seen by the readers as an outright villain. "I could have almost accepted a Dark Phoenix if she was a totally despicable monster," Shooter explains. "The key thing that made it unacceptable" were her moral "flipflops" between her moral Jean self and her Dark Phoenix self. Claremont disliked the space prison idea, believing that to be true to his characters, he would then have to have the X-Men devote their full time to trying to break Jean out of the prison. Then if they succeeded, Lilandra would go after Jean to imprison her again, and a never-ending cycle would be set up. Shooter meanwhile ultimately decided that even the "man-made hell" of a prison was insufficient punishment for such a monumentally heinous crime, and so he insisted on Jean's death. Claremont decided that Lilandra would execute Jean rather than "lobotomize" her, but Shooter pointed out that the X-Men would never just stand by while Jean was killed. Instead, Shooter decided that she should commit suicide.

At first Byrne and Claremont thought that all of 137 would have to be redone, and refused to do it. Shooter gave 137 to current *X-Men* editor Louise Jones, who had talks with him, Claremont and Byrne about the matter, and it was finally agreed that a new final six pages would be plotted and drawn for 137, and that Claremont would rewrite the dialogue and captions for the entire issue. The lengthly flashback sequences in 138 would not be redrawn (except for those recapping the end of 137) but the framing sequences would be, and the latter are now set at Jean's funeral.

Byrne and Claremont both point out that they do not object to the fact that Shooter insisted on changing the ending and that it is his duty to do so if he feels they made a mistake. Claremont believes that the planet's annihilation "made the issue more effective" but agrees that "from a schematic standpoint the death of the asparagus race was gratuitous, icing on the cake." He explains that he could have had Dark Phoenix destroy a star with uninhabited planets and the point would still have been made, to Lilandra and to the readers, that Dark Phoenix posed a threat to life in the universe. Nevertheless, Claremont is unhappy with the new denouement. Referring to Shooter, he states "It was Jim's decision; it was the system's fault. Jim was perfectly justified in doing what he did. He saw what he thought was a major thematic flaw, and acted to prevent it. What I object to is the fact that the system didn't catch it sooner." The destruction of the planet was "something that would have required a minor art and script change" in 135 that could have been made had the problem been caught in time. Since it was not, the result is that they have had to "kill off one of the oldest characters and the second oldest romantic relationship in Marvel Comics. It was unnecessary."

For his part, Shooter declares that this was "the first time I've interfered with anyone's story" by "giving an edict" and otherwise commends the "Dark Phoenix" epic as a good "cosmic adventure" story.



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The issue of whether or not Jean had to die comes down to the question of her responsibility for her actions as Dark Phoenix. As Shooter observes, it is "a real philosophical nut to crack." Byrne reports that he himself "never thought of Dark Phoenix as insane." To his mind, Jean had the "power of moral choice" as Dark Phoenix and was "quite aware" of what she was doing and "willing" to do it. "She's responsible for both sides of herself," Byrne asserts, but he concedes that when Jean is exposed to the rush of power that comes from being Dark Phoenix, she has no other option but to "choose and enjoy evil." But perhaps the real question is whether or not she submitted to Wyngarde's temptations, which brought out the dark side of her personality, voluntarily. Byrne believes that she did, that "she could have turned them down" but she "enjoyed" the "timeslip" visions and did not, although Byrne allows that this was "not underlined perhaps" in the stories.

Claremont takes an entirely different interpretation. He sees Jean as having been both repelled and "fascinated" by the evil she witnessed in her visions, but asserts that Jean did not think of these visions as real. He says Jean thought she

--REACHING OUT TO THE MAIMED CREATURE, TRYING HIS BEST TO EASE ITS HURT.
I'M HERE, JEAN--
--TAKE MY HAND!
HER GRIP MAKES NO SENSE WITH PAIN, YET HE KNOWS, SHE'S NEVER NEEDED HIS LOVE, HIS STRENGTH... MORE THAN SHE DOES NOW.
HE WILL NOT FAIL HER.
IT CANNOT EXIST.
I FEEL SO EMPTY INSIDE... THERE'S ONLY A HOLLOW ACHE -- AS IF SOMEONE HAD JUST PUNCED A HOLE THROUGH MY HEART.
SCOTT, IS SHE ALL RIGHT??
HAVEN'T YOU BEEN

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was merely having something like a "bad dream" in which she was "just watching" the actions of an ancestor who "wasn't her." "I'm doing nasty things," Claremont says Jean thought, "but it's not real." Before she realized it, Mastermind had turned her into the Black Queen, the damage to the balance of good and evil in her mind had been done, and her transformation into Dark Phoenix had been triggered. "Mastermind set an unstoppable, uncontrollable series of events into action," says Claremont. "He pulled the graphite rods out of a nuclear reactor." The result was that "Jean was briefly, tragically overwhelmed by the assumption of godlike power; she was swept up by a tidal wave of emotion." The events of 135 and 136 took place over only four hours, he calculates. During that time she was "swept up by forces within herself she could not control" and went into "a Conan-esque berserker rage." It would taske her "time to regain control of herself" but she could not do so on her own within such a short space of time. What was left of Jean's buried moral sense within her made her seek out her parents for help, and prevented her from killing the X-Men, although she did not consciously realize that. Claremont asserts that Scott could have helped Jean to take control of herself had Xavier not reawakened Dark Phoenix's fury by attacking her. Claremont is not certain that all of this came across to the readers; it's the trouble, he concedes, with "writing subtexts."

Claremont had hoped that 137 would turn out to be a story about mercy. "I wanted a hopeful ending, a happy ending. Certain things must in and of themselves be forgiven. What makes Marvel-Earth special is that people have the potential to do great, but also horrible things. What differentiates our species from Lilandra's is that they can understand and forgive. Jean's friends and Lilandra saw Dark Phoenix for what it was, understood it, and forgave Jean, because it was not done with an awareness of what she was doing."

Byrne did not feel when he drew the destruction of the planet that Jean would have to die because of it, and Claremont believes that Jean was severely punished even in 137's original ending. First, he says, for a telepath to lose her powers is comparable to a normal man going blind and deaf. Second, she would have to live with the memory of what she had done. Would that prove to be too much for her? Claremont thinks Jean would have felt that "the best way to make up for this is to live, remember, and use her power [if it returned] for the benefit of people."

The differing opinions on Jean's guilt perhaps bear out Shooter's own judgement on the matter. "It might be good to write a story in which these questions are raised," he says, and he would not put restrictions on the way in which the questions were resolved. However, with regard to Dark Phoenix, "the set-up was inadequate for a base for the kind of story we're talking about." Shooter feels that Claremont and Byrne "literally ignored demonstrating the possibility of insanity. It had to be planned from the beginning." Claremont concedes that "Shooter may have a point" about "establishing [Jean's] insanity" as Dark Phoenix.

Byrne and Claremont had plans for the Scott-Jean relationship had it continued. After the psychic lobotomy, Byrne says, Scott would be "wondering if Jean was still the woman he loved" while Jean would have to "relearn her former personality." In the meantime, Byrne says, Jean would decidedly not conform to the mold of the "self-reliant, strong Claremont Woman." Byrne thinks it would have been an interesting challenge to himself and Claremont to keep Jean as a major character in the book even though she could no longer participate in the battles. As for plans beyond that for Scott and Jean, Claremont says he intended some major developments, but prefers not to say what they would have been. He says he liked dealing with the Scott-Jean relationship: it was, he states, a way of showing "two kids growing up" with their powers acting as a "metaphor" for the careers and potential for independent action that they have as adults, and their psychic rapport serving as an "exercise in trust."

As for Scott without Jean, Claremont comments that the worst loss that anyone could suffer is "the death of a beloved spouse" and "Jean is his spouse; they were married in all but name. Her death cuts the living heart from him." Scott will "become darker, grimmer again," observes Byrne, who feels that it is Scott's "brooding character" that creates much of his appeal to readers. "He could develop strength out of this" loss he has suffered, Byrne speculates, and Claremont agrees that Scott has undergone a "rite of passage" and emerged as "a man, no longer a young adult." Scott will leave the team for at least six issues; Storm will reluctantly assume leadership in his absence, and the Angel will rejoin the team at least until Scott's return. Claremont does not envision Scott forming a new romantic relationship for a long time, although Byrne thinks he may "play the field" for a while.

Will Jean ever be resurrected? Claremont says he has figured out several ways to do it. Shooter does not see any way in which she could be brought back that he would approve, but he does not rule out the possibility of resurrecting her. Byrne, however, feels strongly that it would "really be a cheat to the readers to bring her back," as he believes the cloning of the late Gwen Stacy in *Spider-Man* was.

What is the final judgement of the concerned parties on 137 as it now stands? Byrne thinks it is "a better product all the way down the line" than it was, with "a visually better ending." Claremont and Jones agree that it is a "stronger" story now, and Shooter and Byrne hope it proves to be controversial since that would mean it had a strong effect on the readers. "The ending is the best possible compromise considering all the circumstances, creative, economic, and in scheduling," declares Claremont, who also observes that "People may despise me for this, they may hate me, but they won't be uninterested."

(A review of X-Men *137 can be found elsewhere in this issue.)*

THAT IS WHAT MAKES HUMANITY VIRTUALLY UNIQUE IN THE COSMOS, MY FRIEND -- THIS EXTRA-ORDINARY CAPACITY FOR SELF-SACRIFICE...
...THIS ABILITY TO TRIUMPH OVER SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES IF THE CAUSE BE JUST, KNOWING ALL THE WHILE THAT TO DO SO MEANS CERTAIN DEATH.
THE X-MEN DO NOT REALIZE IT-- THEY MAY NEVER REALIZE, OR ACCEPT IT-- BUT THIS DAY THEY HAVE WON PERHAPS THE GREATEST VICTORY OF THEIR YOUNG LIVES.
JEAN GREY COULD HAVE LIVED TO BECOME A GOD. BUT IT WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO HER THAT SHE DIE.. A HUMAN.
The End ?

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Comics Feature Interview:

DENNY O'NEIL

Dean Mullaney

Denny O'Neil has been writing comic books for close to fifteen years and is generally regarded by his peers, and readers, as one of the finest craftsmen in the field. In a time when the word "professional" doesn't quite mean what it used to, Denny reminds us of the true meaning of the word.

He was one of the first people to break into comics in the 1960s, joining the Marvel staff at a time when the staff consisted solely of Stan Lee, Flo Steinberg and Roy Thomas. After a brief stay on Marvel's staff, Denny began freelancing for Marvel, where he scripted Dr. Strange *following Ditko's departure, and for Charlton, where his many scripting assignments done under the pseudonym "Sergius O'Shaunnessy" helped, as he says, teach him the craft. The "O'Shaunnessy" pseudonym was also used on his "Black Brother" creation in the first issue of Marvel's* Savage Tales.

Denny eventually found his way to DC, where he established himself as an innovative creator, writing such seminal works as the "new" Green Lantern/Green Arrow in collaboration with Neal Adams, and the return of The Batman *as an exciting and interesting character. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Denny's stories were partially responsible for keeping much of the excitment in the DC line when most of the attention was focused on Marvel. In fact, his and Neal Adams' work on* GL/GA *and* Batman *introduced many "exclusive" Marvel readers to DC's heroes.*

Denny has been in the forefront in revamping characters to keep up with the times, as witnessed by his work on Wonder Woman, Superman *and others. His handling of* The Shadow, Capt. Marvel, The Joker *and numerous other DC series have proved him prolific as well as creative. All of this is a testament to Denny being one of the true professionals in the business.*

The following interview was conducted in early May by Peter Sanderson and Dean Mullaney, as Denny was beginning his new career as an editor at Marvel and writer of the Amazing Spider-Man *series.*

FEATURE: We understand you're writing a book about the history of comics?

O'NEIL: Yes. It's for Scholastic Press and should be finished next week. It won't be the definitive last word on the subject — it won't even be *my* last word on the subject. It's presumably aimed at kids about 13 or 14 and since it's for Scholastic Press, it's supposed to be educational. I want to make it entertaining. I've tried to take the medium from its predecessors to *The Yellow Kid* to the present, obviously not going into any depth on any one subject. On the other hand, I've tried not to make it just a catalog of titles and dates as many histories of comics are. I'm concentrating on the ones I felt were important and indicating *why* I think they were important and then just mentioning the others.

FEATURE: Which ones are you concentrating on?

O'NEIL: I did a chapter on *Popeye*, I did a chapter on Milton Caniff, one on *The Spirit*, I went heavily into *Pogo*, *Krazy Kat*, *Superman*, *Batman*, the Marvel characters that started in the early 1960s, *Doonesbury*, *Peanuts*. . . the ones that were either enormously popular or that I felt were seminal, that changed the medium in some way or taught us a new way to do it.

FEATURE: Do you think such a book can be educational and entertaining?

O'NEIL: Yeah. I don't think it's possible to study the history of comics without learning something about American history, and the history of the media in general, which has virtually been the same thing for the last seventy or eighty years. I've tried to include enough direct first person quotes so that the kids reading the book will get some notion of what the so-called "creative process" is all about.

FEATURE: Do you mean to say that you are going to deal with how comics through the years have mirrored the trends in American culture?

O'NEIL: Yes. It's one of my favorite theories that comics have, more than any other medium, been a direct mirror to their audience, to that broad spectrum of the American public which responds to them. When I used to do lectures at colleges, I would call it "Comics as Instant Mythology." There was a European scholar who posited that mythology was the lowest common denominator of storytelling: you get a story and after it passes through ten generations, what you come out with is what the ten generations could agree upon was central to that story. There's a very similar process that happens with comics, with the mass media in general, in that we know we have to appeal to a large number of people who don't have a lot in common politically, socially, spiritually, and even in terms of age. That's a built-in lowest common denominator factor. It goes through a lot of hands and heads before it even gets that far. Functioning as a writer, I have to think of a story that I like and I have to modify it so that an editor likes it; the editor meanwhile is answering to an editorial chief, who in turn is answering to a publisher, who in turn is answering to a corporate head, who is answering in turn to advertisers, and simultaneously to a board. That's a lot of people that you have to please, or who have to respond to a given story before you even get to an audience. And as I said, the audience is a wide spectrum of people in itself. This is that mythologizing process happening in a very accelerated manner — in a couple of months instead of two hundred years.

FEATURE: So that in doing a comics story you are creating archetypal stories, archetypal characters that everybody in a society can relate to?

O'NEIL: Yeah. Of course, there have been people who have used the medium as a strong vehicle for their individual voices. Garry Trudeau is probably the best of the current examples, and the way they get away with it is by being witty enough so that people respond to the humor or the spriteliness or whatever it is, and manage not to be offended by what they might be very offended by on an editorial page.

FEATURE: Although you could say that Trudeau reflects the opinions of a large segment of American society.

O'NEIL: Yeah. You have to do that. I could occasionally respond to *Li'l Abner* in the latter days of its existence, and God knows, I disagreed with everything that Al Capp stood for, and still do. But I could respond to the fact that he was occasionally funny.

I can't think of any "artform" that so accurately mirrors its culture. That's been one of the interesting things about comics. I don't have a lot of interest in comics from a historical or literary standpoint, as literature, but then I don't have a lot of interest in the stuff that's taught in college literature courses as literature either, anymore. But I do find it interesting from a sociological point of view.

FEATURE: What do you think the superhero genre has to say about American society? What does it reflect about society?

O'NEIL: At its best, superheroes are what we think is the best in our collective culture, made distinctive by the costume. At its worst, it's a kind of vigilantism/fascism that is a little scary. Obviously I try to keep that out of my own superhero work. When I was doing *Batman*, I had to simply state as an article of faith that he is right and when he disagrees with somebody, they are wrong. That sort of gives him a divine right: he is correct in what he does, therefore he is justified in operating outside the law and outside societal structure.

FEATURE: People who are afraid of fascistic tendencies in comics might say that that is the kind of story that would appeal to that audience.

O'NEIL: Sure. And that's a real danger.

FEATURE: It must have been even more dangerous with *The Shadow*.

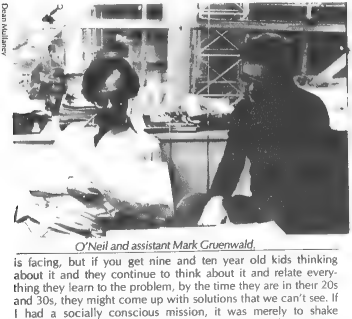
O'NEIL: Yeah, except . . . I did a thing with the Shadow that nobody noticed. I never gave him thought balloons and I tried to play him almost as a god, somebody who is so distant and so outside of human consideration that he *was* right. You could tell it. This person was obviously not human in some way.

FEATURE: Do you think comic books reflect societal changes and attitudes less than comic strips do?

O'NEIL: Yes, in that they are not so tied to deadline schedules. They probably appeal to a much narrower audience, and it's an audience which seems to me to be narrowing year by year, so they are probably not the accurate mirrors that comic strips are, but they're still very largely mirrors. The first generation of comic book people came to their maturity in a war atmosphere and the comics tended to be very chauvinistic for a long time because everybody was chauvinistic. From 1939 to 1945 there was a clear and present and obvious danger to the survival of this country. You had to be either extremely radical, like the Catholic Worker people, or you had to be a chauvinist. I came to maturity in an era when things were being questioned a lot, so many of my stories ten years ago were very conscious slaps at the war mentality of the guys who had come before me. It seems to me that what I think of as the third generation of comic book people are turning conservative again. And I am getting conservative because I'm now over 40 and that always happens (laughter). What I did was in no way messianic. I never proposed solutions to any of those problems I wrote about. I merely wanted to state that the problems existed. I usually fudged the endings of the stories in one way or another so that it was obvious that you weren't supposed to do what Green Arrow says, you were merely supposed to respond to the existence of a problem.

FEATURE: You wanted to present the problem to the reader and have them think about it, rather than proselytize?

O'NEIL: Yeah. My theory is that it's too late for my generation to do anything about what I consider the big problems the world



O'Neil and assistant Mark Gruenwald.

is facing, but if you get nine and ten year old kids thinking about it and they continue to think about it and relate everything they learn to the problem, by the time they are in their 20s and 30s, they might come up with solutions that we can't see. If I had a socially conscious mission, it was merely to shake people and say, "Look, we're fouling things up and you've got to do something about it. Somebody's got to do something about it." I remember that when I was a kid, the *Superman* radio show did a public service spot in which Superman explained what melanin was and how that changed skin color. Being raised in a lily white, lower middle class, Irish Catholic neighborhood, the *Negroes*, or *Them*, were people you saw from the window of a streetcar as you passed through the neighborhoods that you had to occasionally pass through as quickly as possible. I remember I was seven or eight and that was a big revelation to me: "Oh, it's something in the pigment. It's some chemical that makes them look like that." I think that helped me unlearn some of what my environment was teaching me. I would like to think that I've performed similar service for the kids of that age who read my stuff. That's never been my primary consideration. My primary consideration has always been to amuse.

FEATURE: Harlan Ellison said the *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* stories — the "relevant" ones — were sophomoric. Do you feel there's any truth to that?

O'NEIL: Sophomoric? Yeah, in that I was aiming at sophomores [laughter]. I was never writing treatises. I never intended to. I don't think that's a very pertinent criticism. Sure they were sophomoric. Who does Harlan think I was aiming for? Ph.D.s?

FEATURE: In other words, you were trying to make them as easy to understand for the audience that. . .

O'NEIL: For anybody that would happen to pick it up in a bus station. If I had wanted to do lengthy treatises on the problems — assuming I understood the problems well enough to do any treatises — I couldn't have done it in twenty-two pages where images were the dominant element.

FEATURE: Do you find it difficult writing more traditional superhero stories having written all of those?

O'NEIL: No, not anymore. In fact, a good 99% of what I do now is "traditional superhero" stories. The social relevance in those stories was exaggerated. If you look at them, they're pretty basic superhero stories in that they have a lot of action, rescues and death traps and all of that stuff in them. I was always aware that they had to be superhero stories. One of the things they probably did for me was help teach me the craft, to the point where I now take a lot of my identity from being a professional and trying to do the work well. That's become more important to me than any other consideration. That period taught me things that would work, and things that would not work. It was a learning experience. It was probably the third great learning experience I had as a professional comic book writer.

FEATURE: What were the other two?

O'NEIL: Working for Charlton as "Sergius O'Shaunnessy," where we had a good editor in Dick Giordano, who did not particularly have any notions about what we should or should not do. It was a great place to make mistakes. Besides, I was hiding behind a pseudonym.

And the first was six months under Stan Lee, at the point when Stan Lee was very concerned about teaching people his way of doing it.

FEATURE: What did Stan's teaching consist of?

O'NEIL: Basic storytelling, how to get action started, how to write sharp, pointed dialogue, how to think in terms of the reader's response instead of my own response to the material — which is probably the biggest single factor which differentiates the amateur from the professional. Amateurs respond to the material themselves and assume others will respond the same way. Professionals know that that is almost never true, and that they've got to go for your response and forget about their own.

FEATURE: Can you give us an example of something like that?

O'NEIL: Anybody's first short story is probably autobiographical and probably moves them to tears, and they probably leave out most of the things that would move me to tears because they know [what they're trying to say] and leave it in the typewriter. A professional will make sure everything gets on the paper, or if it's like Hemingway, if he'll miss anything it will be a carefully reasoned omission.

FEATURE: Whom do you consider your other teachers in the field?

O'NEIL: Primarily experience, people I read, Roy Thomas to some degree, Giordano in a way I can't even define — he just did some magic thing and pulled the best out of us and made me think of new ideas, of being excited about doing the material — Julie Schwartz, who is a consumate professional who insists on things like story structure and made me think about it for the first time in my life.

FEATURE: Do you think you're in the position of a teacher now, working as an editor?

O'NEIL: Yes, and I sometimes worry that I'm not doing it well enough. I don't have an infinite amount of patience for one thing, and if somebody isn't getting something after a couple of hours . . . I don't blow up at them, but I tend to withdraw because I begin to get bored with the process. Whereas somebody like Joe Orlando, for example, can very patiently explain for seven or eight hours, and I envy him that.

I used to think I was a good teacher, but I'm beginning to question that now in that I'm noticing this lack of patience. I'm also working on that more than any one facet of the editorial job. It's part of an editor's job. If I were editing *Playboy*, it wouldn't be part of my job because it's assumed that everyone who presumes to submit to that market is already a top-notch professional. But comic books are a specialized craft; there's a lot to learn and there's no place else to learn it but within comics themselves.

FEATURE: Do you think that the lack of a training ground is a problem of comics today?

O'NEIL: Absolutely. I think one of my strengths in the field is that I was a professional writer before I was a comic book writer. The act of writing has always been more important to me than the act of creating a comic book. I would recommend to anybody doing comics to either work somewhere else first or work somewhere else while you're doing comics. For example, the newspaper job taught me a great respect for deadlines and taught me that my own words were not so precious that they couldn't be changed. So I tend not to get hysterical if an editor changes some of my priceless prose because if you're working

in newspaper conditions you have to get the stuff out; it's much more important than making it pretty. I have gotten hysterical at times when editors have changed things, but it has usually been when they changed content, not words. Also, I find that when I go outside of comics now — say, a reporting job for a magazine — I come back sort of refreshed. Working outside of comics also gives me other sources of ideas. Also, if you write a short story, for example, you have to pay a lot more attention to language because you don't have pictures to help you. Therefore, your language skills get honed up a little bit. If you have to do 5,000 words of prose and the project has to be carried on the writing, the words count more than anything else. For all of those points, people should step outside of comics once in a while.

[Papers shuffling]

O'NEIL: You're not going to ask me about *Millie the Model*?

FEATURE: Tell us about *Millie the Model*.

O'NEIL: Oh, terrific gal! [Laughter]

FEATURE: How terrific?

O'NEIL: I'm grateful to Millie. She was the best possible way to break into comics because it was like going to kindergarden for comics. One of the problems guys now have is that there's no easy way to break in. There are no back-up features to learn on. A guy will be thrown on a major book right away and he has to learn the craft in a very difficult situation. He's writing a major character and learning the craft at the same time. I'm really grateful to *Patsy* and *Hedy* and *Millie* because those were like the basic Dick and Jane primer of comic book writing.

FEATURE: The third generation of comic book writers, some of whom you're dealing with as an editor — do you find any problems with the situation in which they've admired your work as readers themselves?

O'NEIL: Yeah, I hate that. I get kidded a lot about my age, and I invite a lot of it. It sort of blows me away when somebody says "You were my favorite writer when I was a kid." [Laughter] I don't want to be anybody's favorite writer. That implies a degree of age and venerability that I don't want to identify with at this point, partially because I'm still learning. Not every time out — I won't be that disgustingly humble — but four or five times a year I learn something new about doing comic books. It's a little scary to be called an influence on people. I've actually been called, within the past six months, a "grand old man." [Sigh] I haven't got a white beard yet. It's a very weird experience, especially since these same people are friends and I socialize with them.

FEATURE: Do you notice any specific recurring problems with newer comic book writers?

O'NEIL: [Laughter] Morally, spiritually, psychologically or professionally?

FEATURE: Professionally.

O'NEIL: I'm not going to name names. This is not the kind of interview where I'm going to assassinate anyone's character. In fact, that's one of the problems: character assassination in the fan press. Can anybody possibly be as bored with it as I am? I can issue a blanket statement: everybody is a putz

Professionally, people are too tied to comics and comics-related material. I think that people should widen their reading interests and comics would benefit from that. I don't think there's any lack of talent — I'm constantly astonished at how bright and talented my colleagues are — but I sometimes think the focus is a bit too narrow. The whole field, probably my work included, would benefit from widening it. Most of the other criticisms of the field as a whole are variations on that. Again, I should state that I'm probably guilty of everything I'm speaking against.

The rampant egotism can sometimes wear me down. It's just as bad as science fiction. It works something like this: I go to a convention in New York and there are a lot of people who know who I am, who want my autograph, I get a certain amount of adulation and a certain amount of the kind of hostility that indicates that the people are paying attention to me. Then I fly out to Chicago for a convention and it's a thousand miles away and people come up to me and ask for my autograph, know who I am, and I get that kind of hostility. Then I'll zip over to London and people will ask for my autograph and I'll get that kind of flattering hostility, and pretty soon I begin to think that I'm a pretty famous dude. And I forget: it's the same five hundred people who are following me around from city to city. Actually, I know science fiction writers who think that they are household names [Laughter]. Nobody outside of science fiction knows who they are, and it's more obvious with comic book people. We tend to get an exaggerated idea of our own fame, our own importance. Sometimes it seems to me to be a parade of swollen egos, which gets to be a little wearying.

Pertinent to both that and the point preceding it: most people who work at a job come home and escape into fantasy: *Charlie's Angels*, comic books or whatever. Within the last five years I've found it necessary to come home and escape into

"If I had a socially conscious mission, it was merely to shake people and say, "Look, we're fouling things up and you've got to do something about it."

THEN THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO HELP!
THE HECK THERE ISN'T! WE CAN STAY,, AND FIGHT,' WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE GOOD AT FIGHTING-- REMEMBER?!
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I'M GETTING A B.T. TIRED OF YOUR LORDING IT OVER ME WITH YOUR MORAL SUPERIORITY ROUTINE..
IF YOU WANT TO BREAK THE LAW--GO AHEAD,' BUT COUNT ME OUT.'
THAT I WILL DO GLADLY.'

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reality, which may be why I don't watch much television and why my reading habits tend to be in detective stories rather than in science fiction and fantasy because detective stories by their nature are more realistic.

FEATURE: You don't read many comics, then?

O'NEIL: I've always read within the field because I've felt a need to keep up with what's been going on. If I were a computer programmer, I would have read books in that field. I have not read everything that's come out for the reason I just mentioned. I have to come home and get into something else. I make my living helping other people fantasize. Merely for purposes of sanity I have to get something else on my leisure hours. But I have never ignored the field. I have read Marvel and DC and even Gold Key and Charlton all along, but selectively: the things I felt were interesting or things I thought might be important for one reason: The only one I've seriously neglected was *Betty and Veronica*.

FEATURE: How did you first break into comics?

O'NEIL: That was in 1965. I was a newspaper reporter in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, which is eight miles from Jackson, Missouri, which is where Roy Thomas comes from. I had a duty to fill up the children's page on Saturdays every two weeks. In the summer there's no school activities so there was nothing much to write about. I had to get forty-eight column inches and noticed that I was seeing comic books around for the first time in maybe ten years. I read a few and thought this was real different from what I remembered. I was really enjoying them. So I wrote some letters to people here in New York and I accumulated enough material to do a few articles on the subject, one of the last of which was an interview with Roy Thomas, who contacted me. Roy moved to New York and sent me — I assume among other people — a Marvel writer's test,

"Essentially, I tried to make the Batman a self-reliant and obsessed character."

which I took as a lark. I got the job offer a week later, at a time when I was disgusted with what I was doing, with the town I was in, and was pretty much willing to take any jump that offered itself. I thought, "Sure, I'll come to New York and do that thing for six months. I'll have some stories to tell when I get back to my real profession, which is journalism." I then discovered that I had a liking and a sort of aptitude for it, and I've been here ever since.

FEATURE: How long did you stay at Marvel the first time?

O'NEIL: Six months on staff and some years as a freelancer. I began doing other things. I contributed to, and later edited, a news magazine in that period. I began doing stuff for Charlton, a number of freelance magazine assignments, and a book called *Contest for Power, A History of Presidential Elections in the USA*. It was a coffee table book. It's a curse of my journalistic career that I did not go deeply into the subject. I had done some articles for a political magazine called *Newsfront*, the publisher of which wanted me to do this book. Because of the work I'd done for his magazine, he asked me.

FEATURE: How was it that you moved over to DC?

O'NEIL: It was mostly through Dick Giordano. When DC hired Dick from Charlton, I gather it was with the understanding that he would bring Skeates, Aparo, Boyette, Ditko and me along with him. I was told that if I wanted to make three times as much money as I was making for doing the same work, I could come along. It sounded like a good deal, so I said "Sure."

On top of that, Charlton was dropping its whole superhero line and I would have been scrambling for assignments anyway. God knows, some of the things we did for Charlton, we should count ourselves blessed that they didn't carry by-lines.

FEATURE: Why did you leave Marvel for Charlton, and then DC?

O'NEIL: A chance to do other types of freelancing.

FEATURE: You talked about being a professional and meeting deadlines. How have your attitudes changed from when you were a freelancer?

O'NEIL: I don't think my attitude has changed in any way at all. When I was a freelancer I tried to be very conscientious about making my deadlines. It always seemed to me that that was an important part of the whole process. If you are working in a periodical medium it is built-in that you have to do things on time so the other people down the line can do their things on time. I got, and get very angry at myself when I miss deadlines. And I do. I just missed one by a week, and I've been known to miss them by more than that. But I'm never happy about it. I'm always irritated with myself.

I feel the same way about other people who do it consistently. Anybody's going to have problems once in a while. They're going to blow it by a month, or even two months because of something that's happening in their lives. You've got to be a kind of an ogre to get mad at that. But somebody who does it every time out and lies to you about it . . . I don't have a lot of patience with that. I didn't have a lot of patience with it when I was a freelancer. If an editor lied to me about something, I got irritated.

Now as an editor, when somebody tells me he missed it because he's sick and I know he missed it because he's doing a job for DC, I don't like it. That happens fairly often. How dumb do they think we are? I had dinner last night with a bunch of DC editors. It's a very tight world and we're all friends. It's impossible to do anything in the world of professional comic books and not have everybody know about it within three days [laughter].

Dean Mullaney

FEATURE: When you were at DC, you were one of the main writers involved with the transformation of the Batman into more of the creature of the night concept. How did this idea of giving the Batman a new style come about?

O'NEIL: When I first went to DC after I had proven myself to be reasonably capable, they offered me a number of things and one of them was the Batman. I refused it at the time because that was either at the tail end of the television show era or right after that era. I didn't want part of that. Time passed and I think they realized at DC that they were stuck with a non-viable concept. Camp was as dead as a buttonhook. They wanted to make a break with any vestige of that. When Julie Schwartz came to me with that, the simplest thing to do, it seemed, was to go back to what the Batman was in 1940. Essentially, that's all I did. I wrote the stories straight, tried to give them some more atmosphere, got rid of a lot of the stuff that had accumulated. It seemed to me that it was fair to keep the Batcave because of a theory I have about series characters, which is they have to have an identifiable home base.

FEATURE: Well, actually, it disappeared for quite a number of years.

O'NEIL: I know and that was not my doing. It seemed to me that I could allow the Batmobile, but all the rest of the stuff tended to detract from the central appeal of the character Insofar as it was possible to ignore it, I did. The utility belt is a good example: for a while it had to be as big as a warehouse! "I need a Tasmanian can opener. Well, I happen to have one right here!" I thought it was fair to use the utility belt if we knew it had certain things that he carried around that he'd have to carry around in the business of being a creature of the night Or, if he anticipated a certain situation: "I'm going to need this because of the situation I'm going to be in." Stick that in the utility belt. But essentially, I tried to make him a self-reliant and obsessed character.

FEATURE: The degree to which he is obsessed seems to be a point you emphasized even more than the 1940s stories.

O'NEIL: Yeah. If I knew Bruce Wayne, I'd feel sorry for him. The poor bastard has to sublimate everything to his need to avenge his parents. I don't think he has any kind of love life or any kind of social life, except the phony one which is again just another tool that he uses in that mission to avenge his dead parents. He's a real psychopathic case.

FEATURE: Psychopathic as in mentally disturbed?

O'NEIL: Wouldn't you say that somebody who can't do anything except fight crime is not a model of mental health? It's like Alfie Bester said somewhere: it's the obsessed characters who are always the interesting ones. That made the Batman a great deal of fun to do. I always knew where he was.

FEATURE: Nonetheless, while the Batman may be obsessed, he still manages to maintain his sanity, whereas the Shadow is much closer to being a real mental case.

O'NEIL: What was it that Steranko said about the Shadow: he didn't believe in the death penalty — he was the death penalty [laughter]. I had to crank into my personal Batman equation an incredible reverance for life that went along with this obsession so that it was as important for him to cherish life as it was to catch criminals. In the latter days of my *Batman* scripting career, I cranked into him a knowledge of his own obsession and a regret that he had it. About that point I felt I had arrived at a viable, well-rounded character. And about that point I quit doing it.

FEATURE: You think that he's emotionally disturbed, but manages to keep a certain amount of control?

O'NEIL: Sure, because of his knowledge of his obsession. I put in scenes where people were surprised that he was gentle, to indicate that if he were not obsessed he would be that kind of man. He would be the sort of very strong man who uses his strengths but does not need to bully because he's so confident of his own moral and physical strength. He doesn't need to prove anything.

FEATURE: You wrote two stories in which you brought the Batman and the Shadow together. In the second one in particular you seemed to be drawing sharp distinctions between their two personalities.

O'NEIL: Sure. There are many sharp distinctions The Batman is, despite his obsessions, always essentially human. We know what his hang-up is. We can understand it and we can sympathize with it. The Shadow is an impersonal force. I never understood what his motivations were, and I didn't presume to have anybody else understand them. He was that guy in the black cloak who meted out justice. I tried to give the other people humanity, for contrast, and also to get some human involvement in the thing.

FEATURE: Do you think that the fact that the Shadow is a character without a sense of humanity about him limited his audience in comics?

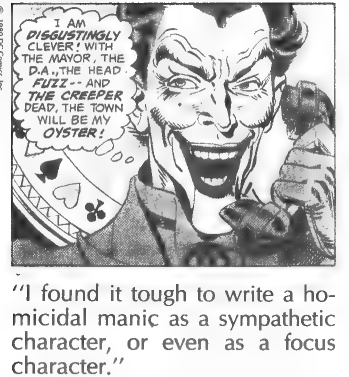
O'NEIL: That may have been one of the problems. It did not perform as we expected it to. There were a lot of problems. That was a star-crossed project from the beginning. One of the reasons it did not find a large audience was because of the conscious decision I made to make him impersonal. That may have been a mistake. I don't think that anything is holy writ, and even though Walter Gibson's stories treated him impersonally, I might have been well advised to go in some other direction.

FEATURE: It seemed as though in the final issue of his series, you tried to give the Shadow a more supernatural air than in the earlier issues. He was beginning to develop the power to cloud men's minds.

O'NEIL: Yeah. A character always evolves. One of the fascinating things about doing a series character is that you grow with them and they evolve inside your head. That was obviously what the Shadow was evolving into. I don't know where he would have gone from there, but he was, in the first few stories, pretty close to the Batman and I realized that wasn't working well. Or at least my instincts were pulling me in some other direction

FEATURE: You also seemed as though you were working towards an origin story for the Shadow.

O'NEIL: I was eventually going to pull together a lot of the stuff



"I found it tough to write a homicidal manic as a sympathetic character, or even as a focus character."

Walter Gibson hinted at in the Kent Allard-Lamont Cranston relationship. I had it pretty well plotted.

FEATURE: Gibson went into pretty much detail about the Kent Allard identity.

O'NEIL: I would have read Gibson's stuff very carefully. I would have possibly talked to Walter Gibson and would have done that in a comic book version.

FEATURE: You mentioned before that you don't think the Batman could have a love life. What do you think of Steve Englehart's Silver St. Cloud subplot?

O'NEIL: I never believed it. I think those are great stories, but they're not the Batman I wrote. Not only was it Silver St. Cloud, but it was stated that all his other affairs were short termed. I don't think that guy I wrote about would have short term affairs, or indeed, any other kind of affairs.

FEATURE: Do you think that's a problem with series characters — that different writers, whether simultaneously or over a period of time, write the same character differently?

O'NEIL: Yeah. Sometimes it astonishes me that some character like the Batman can survive through so many different incarnations. Englehart's was different from mine, and we were both way, way different from Bob Haney's. It's one of the things that makes it interesting: starting from the same place, people can go to so many different destinations. Yet it also obviously interferes with the audience identification with the character.

FEATURE: As an admirer of Will Eisner's work, has *The Spirit* influenced your work with the Batman?

O'NEIL: Yes, but not enough, though. I've tried I don't know how many times to do a Will Eisner story and I never made it. I tried it recently, in the last *Batman* story I did, the Golden Fleece story. It was yet another shot at what Will did. I think it's a good enough story, but it's not Eisner. Just let me one day before I die write one story like some of those Silk Satin stories that Will did. I won't say I'll be satisfied then, because I'm not going to make that presumptuous a statement, but I would love to be able to do it. I don't think I ever will. I don't think any of us who don't handle the art and stories simultaneously will ever do that. Will himself has said that he would be a bad comic book artist if he had to work from somebody else's script because he would change it. He did collaborate with Feiffer, but it was such a tight collaboration, and according to both of them, nothing went out of the house that didn't have Eisner in it, where he did not in some way ultimately control it. I don't think anybody has come close to Eisner doing the action/adventure kind of stuff, because he handled both ends of the creative process. Eisner the artist was able to perfectly interpret the intention of Eisner the writer. That's something that the rest of us don't have, unfortunately.

FEATURE: You did the first story that began to change the way in which the Joker was presented, the Joker's Five-Way Revenge plot. How did the idea for that one come about?

O'NEIL: Somebody said, "Do a Joker story" and I didn't want to do the Cesar Romero Joker. I went back and read the first Joker stories and it was obvious to me that he was a screaming nut, a homicidal maniac. That's the way I played it.

FEATURE: Do you think the stories of the Joker's own short-lived book dilluted that concept?

O'NEIL: Sure. I found it tough to write a homicidal maniac as a sympathetic character, or even as a focus character. You've got to have conflict and who do you put against him if he is the nominal hero? I used clowns, in effect, Laurel and Hardy type characters. I don't think it worked.

FEATURE: Why did you do the book, then?

O'NEIL: Because I'm a professional and I'm told to do it. Unless it's something that I have really strong moral problems with . . . I have always refused to do war stories because I've spent more time than most people in the military and I don't like the military milieu. I don't like the military minds. I knew I would have a lot of trouble trying to make Sgt. Rock heroic in my own head. I did not do romance stories because they demeaned the people's sexuality in a way. Apart from that, I'll try anything until it's proven that I'll absolutely bomb on it.

FEATURE: Would you be interested in doing an anti-military story, or would you prefer to do that in the context of a more accessible superhero tale?

O'NEIL: It's the mentality I have problems with, not the soldiers per se. Or certainly not the idea of violence. I would do an anti-war story willingly, but I don't see how I could do it in a Code comic because it's the ultimate anti-war story, *Johnny Got His Gun*, about somebody who comes home as a basket case. That's what war is about to me. It's about guys who tell their kids to go into situations where they'll have their limbs blown off. There haven't been very many wars throughout history that I've felt were justified. Possibly World War II in recent history, but none of the other wars in this century. If I could do a story that would be as horrifying as *Johnny Got His Gun*, that would be an anti-war story. Not the kind of thing where you show these guys obviously having a terrific time for fifteen pages slaughtering ratskis by the horde and then at the end say "Yeah, but this really has been rough. Hasn't it, guys? War is hell, huh?" I don't believe that for a second. They obviously loved it. I know people in real life who love it, and I don't want anything to do with them.

FEATURE: In a sense this is a problem with all action/adventure comics. All of them seem built around the hero beating up the villain.

O'NEIL: There's a complicated question in there. It has to do with the fact that we have a 5,000 year old tradition, in not only Western but Eastern culture, of the warrior as hero. I don't presume to fight 5,000 years of culture. The nature of the medium calls for broad visual action. We're not ever doing Henry James. We're not even ever doing *Hamlet*. The way to demonstrate conflict in broad visual terms is to have people in broad physical conflict. There's also violence and there's violence. The violence inflicted by an 88mm cannon is impersonal and horrible; the violence that Muhammed Ali inflicts

on somebody who is physically matched with him is an artform, I think. An existential artform. I watch fights on television; I've meddled around with the martial arts. I like and appreciate violence as an artform in that respect. But that implies a one-to-one personal involvement with it. A guy who's aiming an 88mm cannon at a target that is ten miles away that he can't even see is not art. It's technology. Admirable technology, that he can figure out the trajectories, but to me it's horrible. But where there's one man hitting another in a context where they're physically equal, that is not horrible. It can be beautiful.

FEATURE: So you look at a fight in a superhero comic as a sort of exhibition match?

O'NEIL: It depends on how I write it. In the broadest possible sense, it's a symbolic conflict. The physical combat standing for whatever moral issue are involved. In another sense, some of the stuff Neal [Adams] did when we had the Batman involved in the martial arts was the other thing I'm talking about. What you get are Bruce Lee movies at their very best: the sense of a man who realizes himself through this kind of conflict.

FEATURE: The Ra's al Ghul stories were in part, then, based on the Bruce Lee movies and, I suspect, the James Bond movies as well?

O'NEIL: No. When we did the first of those, I had never seen a Bruce Lee movie. I had studied judo at that point and then began to read. I think I was one of the first people to use the martial arts in comics. I had some ninja-like assassins in a *Batman* story using tetsu-bishi way back and that was a long time before those Hong Kong movies came over to this country or martial arts were integrated into our collective consciousness — except maybe a little bit in the James Bond movies, but that was not real martial arts.

I've been aware of martial arts for at least fifteen years on one level or another. I wrote a book called *Dragons Fist* with Jim Barry — by my perceptions, a pretty terrible novel [laughter] — but also pretty accurate. We both got involved with various martial arts courses, talked to a lot of people and did a lot of reading. We started that book right after the beginning of the martial arts craze. By the time it was published, the thing had peaked.

Right after I saw *Five Fingers of Death* I talked to some people I know in show business and found out that a lot of those movies were being imported and that something called *Enter the Dragon* was in preproduction, and Warners was going to pour a lot of money into it. And *Billy Jack*, which was really the first martial arts movie, was knocking everybody out, myself included. I went to the powers-that-be at DC and said "This is going to be the next big thing. We've got to do this in comic books." I was told, and I will never forget this direct quote: "I don't like the figures on it." To this day I have no idea what that means. I think it means "I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm afraid to admit that I don't know what you're talking about so I'll say I don't like the figures." I went away saying I'll put this stuff in *Batman*. Then the craze came and went, Marvel did its various kung-fu characters and I was approached by the various powers-that-be: "You know, we ought to do some of this karate, kung-fu stuff." And I thought "Oh, gee. Right. A little late, but we'll do it." *Richard Dragon, Kung Fu Fighter* was the character from the book Jim Barry and I wrote, so I did the adaptation.

FEATURE: Did you know from the very first League of Assassins story that it was going to turn into this epic covering the entire world?

O'NEIL: No, I had no idea. The first story had Talia and not Ra's. She was just one of those people you need to invent because you need somebody to perform a certain function in a plot.

About that time it was decided by everybody involved with the Batman that he needed a grand villain in the great tradition of grand villains, so we consciously set out to create that person. The name Ra's al Ghul was thought to be corny at the time, but the name really means Demon's Star in Arabic. Julie Schwartz looked that up. How we decided to make Talia his daughter, I don't remember.

I think Talia is the one woman whom the Batman may break his vow of celibacy for.

FEATURE: Really? She always struck me as a little emotionally disturbed.

O'NEIL: She is [laughter], but if you had Ra's al Ghul as an old man, you'd be emotionally disturbed, too! I think any Ra's story has to have Talia in it. She's an integral part of him and what makes those stories work is that weird Freudian triangle.

FEATURE: Then Ra's looks upon the Batman as a potential son?

O'NEIL: Sure. That's stated. The first story is about testing the Batman to see if he's worthy to become Ra's's son-in-law. They're the two toughest guys in the world and they have tremendous respect for each other. At least in the stories that I've done, I've tried to have one piece of dialogue that states that directly.

FEATURE: Does this desire on Ra's' part continue? For example, is it why he doesn't blow the whistle on the Batman's secret identity?

O'NEIL: Absolutely. Also, he respects the Batman. He's not going to screw him up gratuitously. If Ra's could somehow get a benefit from blowing the whistle on the Batman's secret identity he might, but at least in the stories that I wrote, it would have gotten him nothing except revenge and he's much too terrific a guy to go for petty revenge. He's really a noble human being. In many ways more noble than the Batman. In the way I conceived Ra's, he had this grand scheme for saving the world from the various ravages that threatened it, which required an absolute dictator at the top. Very rationally, he decided he was the best qualified to be that absolute dictator. And he might be.

FEATURE: Do you think the Batman is too hard on Talia when he tells her in some stories to get lost?

O'NEIL: I think it must tear his guts out to do that. Those were the times when I really felt sorry for him. In the last one I wrote, as my little farewell gift to the Batman, I gave him twenty-four hours with Talia during which they didn't have any crimes to solve or any crises to handle. They presumably did *everything* they've always wanted to do.

FEATURE: It seems to me that many of your costumed villains stories don't reflect as much of your personality as your non-costumed villains stories. You don't seem as interested in the costumed villains.

O'NEIL: For a long time I consciously didn't do them. I wanted to do something else. That was probably another of the mistakes I've made, since costumed villains seem to be intrinsic to the whole superhero gestalt. Ra's is sort of a costumed villain. . .

FEATURE: But he's different from the regular run of costumed villains. He's different from the Penguin, certainly.

O'NEIL: Well, the Penguin I never had any luck with. He's a silly little man and I couldn't get excited about him. I tried, but even in that story I ended up bringing in Talia to give it some dimension.

You may be right. I haven't really thought about it, and honestly can't answer that.

FEATURE: Do you think the original Captain Marvel is a viable character for today's audience?

O'NEIL: He's now a hybrid. He's somewhere between superhero and that wonderful, whimsical thing that he was in the 1940s. I tried to do Captain Marvel in the Otto Binder mode and I don't think I succeeded entirely. I don't think I failed entirely, either. The art was, to my eyes, indistinguishable; it was the same guy whose style hasn't changed. Why it didn't succeed, I have no idea. It might be that the world has changed a lot and the sensibility that responded to that strip does not exist except

in isolated pockets anymore.

FEATURE: Do you think a part of it is that the audience may take their characters too seriously today, and can't accept a whimsical character?

O'NEIL: Yeah. Whenever I've tried to have any fun with superheroes, on any level, I got a lot of hate mail. It's one of the things that bothers me, people take this stuff so seriously. I don't take Dostoevsky and Shakespeare that seriously. They're just stories. Storytelling is essential to any culture; it's important. I don't think any one given story or one given character is important: it's the phenomenon. When people take superheroes, which should be entertaining and fun, so grim and seriously, it's a little spooky. The stories that I liked in the old *Captain Marvel* canon were the whimsical ones. That's what I responded to: the sense of lightness and fun. And that's what a lot of our recent audience seems to disdain. Ditto Plastic Man. I don't know what DC is doing with its current incarnation of Plastic Man, but he does not seem to have found an audience since Jack Cole died. It may be that Jack Cole was magic in some way, or it may be the same phenomenon, of being too whimsical.

FEATURE: Do you think part of the lack of response to these characters has to do with the cartoony style of the art? Readers appear to want realism in the art as well.

O'NEIL: Everybody wants Neal Adams now. That may be a large part of the problem.

FEATURE: Even in comic strips, the art is not as finely rendered as in comic books.

O'NEIL: To my eyes, it's very inferior. The strips are now lagging behind comic books by ten years. I think that's been true for a number of years. In a way it's a more prestigious racket, and in certain ways it requires certain skills we don't need to bring to comic books, but generally, I don't think they're as interesting as comics book . . . with exceptions. Caniff is the consummate craftsman. He's always good. While I don't like Steve Canyon personally, because he's a military man, I think the stories are terrific and the art knocks me out. *Modesty Blaise* is terrific no matter who's drawing it. But not many of the others are as interesting or as sophisticated as the average comic book.

FEATURE: When you did *Superman* for Julie Schwartz, you got rid of Kryptonite, Clark Kent moved to a television station, and other characters like the Bizarros and Lana were left in the shadows. How did this major change come about?

O'NEIL: I always had a lot of problems with *Superman*. I only did thirteen or fourteen issues. It's one of the few times when I breached my own rule and asked to be taken off a book because I couldn't stand him anymore. Moving him to a television studio was not my decision. Getting rid of Kryptonite was my decision because it had become such a crutch. Even though we don't adhere to strict reality in comic books, exactly how big was that planet, anyway? [Laughter] Kryptonite was devised by the radio writers, in 1943, I think. It probably seemed like a great gimmick at the time: one piece of Kryptonite. But not in the huge quantities. Then it got to be green, purple, mauve with pink stripes, and Nelson Bridwell is the only one in the world who keeps track of all the permutations. I didn't like those stories. I also didn't like the fact that he was four times as powerful as any deity that has ever existed. I tried simultaneously to make him faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. I thought that was enough for any young superhero. I could conceive of getting him into trouble without contriving stuff.

Immediately after I got off the book they restored all the old stuff. I find the run of *Superman* in the 1950s unreadable. They were very popular, and I don't know why. Every dumb story had to do with his double identity: "Is Lois going to find out?" Who cares? I didn't and that's why I stopped reading comics when that became prevalent. With Superman as with the Batman, I tried to take him back to what I responded to as a kid, which had to do with [laughter] crashing through walls on visual terms.

FEATURE: And here you are doing *Spider-Man*. What are the differences working on Marvel and DC heroes?

O'NEIL: There's a basic difference in the mentalities of the companies. If I had to put it into English Lit terms, it would be this. DC is classical and Marvel is romantic-existential. There's a different form of sensibilities that formed the characters that still carries through.

I chose *Spider-Man* out of several possibilities that were offered to me. He is one character, strong but not so strong that he disintegrates planets by merely listening hard. Dealing with an urban setting leaves a lot of room for tight focus stories, for one person problem stories. All with the option to do cosmic stuff.

It may be because the characters haven't existed as long that

"They're the two toughest guys in the world and they have a tremendous respect for each other."

the Marvel characters are not so precisely defined as most of DC's characters.

My first *Spider-Man* story is not involved with a very big problem. It's a tight focus story. I wanted to start off with something small, first of all to show that he did not have to fight world crushers all the time. Secondly, so I could get to know the character, the milieu and the supporting cast.

FEATURE: The series originally did not deal with world problems, and seemed to work better that way.

O'NEIL: Yeah. Peter Parker was a shmucky kid and a lot of the appeal of the strip had to do with his shmucky high school problems.

We were talking before of Clark Kent becoming a television reporter. I think that was a mistake for this reason: it makes him glamorous, it makes him not all that different from Superman. Shelly Mayer and I agree on this: the basic appeal is the contrast between the loser and Superman. The more noble and admirable you make the double identity half of him, the less contrast exists and therefore less emotional reason for having a double identity. I think Clark Kent is losing some of his emotional imperative. Bruce Wayne, when they started making him a philanthropist, began losing it; instead of being a dumb playboy to contrast with the super-serious, ultra-confident Batman. . . . Insofar as Peter Parker is now handsome . . . if that guy's a loser, where do I sign up? He's combing beautiful women out of his hair. I'm not going to meddle with it that much because it's working, but those are reasons why I picked *Spider-Man* as opposed to, say, *Sub-Mariner*. I don't feel like writing an "imperius rex" type of story. I feel like doing the classic Stan Lee thing: if I were a superhero, with all the problems I have now, what kind of superhero would I be?

FEATURE: Do you think you can move *Spider-Man* in that direction considering what's been developed over the past years?

O'NEIL: I think he's suffered from not being too well defined in the last several years. One of the criticisms that's been leveled against him by Neal, among other people, that I tend to agree with is that there's a difference between not being able to cope and whining about it. Sometimes reading *Spider-Man*, I got tired of him kvetching. The way Stan used to do him, he was a guy who didn't quite always manage to do everything he should have done, and he would rue that, rather than say, "Poor me. The world is against me." I hope I can find that line and then walk it. I don't want him to be a sniveler. I just want him to be a guy who isn't quite always on top of things.

I've done five stories so far and I'm just now beginning to feel comfortable doing them. I did them full script because I'm used to working that way. Now I'm working with John Romita, Jr. and we're in the process of finding out each other's strengths and weaknesses. I'm enjoying working the "Marvel way." I was a little scared that I couldn't do it any more, but I'm doing both *Dominic Fortune* and *Spider-Man* that way.

FEATURE: What are the advantages of working the "Marvel way?"

O'NEIL: You get to use the artist's brains in matters of storytelling and pacing. You also don't misinterpret. I've written a lot of stuff where the artist didn't get it. When you're scripting from the art, there's no chance of misinterpretation. You'll tailor the words to fit the image.

FEATURE: You say Spider-Man has the potential to be in cosmic stories. What do you mean by "cosmic?"

O'NEIL: I'm not going to take him into outer space or fantasyland. I have to accept magic as part of the Marvel Universe. Frank Miller and I are doing the Annual as more or less a Spider-Man/Dr. Strange team-up. The kind of magic that Dr. Strange does is part of Spider-Man's world. Traveling to Mars or Alpha Centauri is not something he can do. I have about the same rules for him as I had for the Batman: no hardcore fantasy, and if I'm going to do science fiction, stick to the extrapolative kind. Atom smashers, okay; but not warp drives or time travel.

FEATURE: What were the circumstances by which you left DC to return to Marvel?

O'NEIL: It was a parting that was, at least for me, absolutely without animosity. It was the result of a lot of different things that were going on. I had done the same thing for eleven or twelve years and it looked like I was slated to keep doing the same thing. I didn't think I was going stale yet, but it was a distinct possibility that I would. I've seen people go stale and I wanted to avoid that. I wanted to do something other than write all the time. I was beginning to feel a little like a Xerox machine: I would pull my ear on Monday afternoon and by Thursday afternoon at 2:00, I would have seventeen pages and take them in and then begin the whole process again. I wanted to find some way to use my knowledge of comic books in a way other than writing them. I went to Jim Shooter and mentioned these things. . . Actually, I went to him about getting permission to use Marvel characters in the book I'm writing. He said "okay," and offered me four deals. I took the most conventional one. What surprised me about my decision was that I agreed to work 9 to 5, which [laughter] I hadn't done for years, and am not comfortable doing even now. I'm surprised at the amount of writing I'm doing, maybe a little too much just at the moment to be comfortable with 9 to 5 job.

I think I was totally honest with everybody. I talked to Joe Orlando and Jenette Kahn and said, "This is the deal I've been offered and this is what I find attractive. If you have anything to say about that, I'm certainly willing to listen." What they offered me was okay in terms of money, but it just meant more writing, and involvement with projects that I did not exactly find exciting. They were not comic book projects; they were publishing contracts. I served as an editorial consultant on one of them. It was a job, and I did it, but I was not turned on by it.

FEATURE: Do you regret the disappearance of the writer/editor system at DC and Marvel?

O'NEIL: Not at all because neither I nor anybody else I've ever met is infallible. I like having an editor there to catch my mistakes. I always have. I don't like editors who edit mistakes *in* to the story . . . that has happened often enough to annoy me. I don't like editors I think are incompetent, but I like the idea of having an editor as somebody to bounce ideas off of, somebody to help with plotting and somebody to catch my mistakes.

FEATURE: As an ideal, the editor will catch your mistakes and guide you along, but do you think it usually works in practice?

O'NEIL: It works often enough so that I think it's a valuable system.

FEATURE: You mentioned the possibility of a writer going stale after a while. Do you think a character can get stale if he's been around too long?

O'NEIL: I think it's possible, but it's not as likely to happen if there's a number of people having input. It's like what we were talking about before: a character gets interpreted many different ways and that can work against him. It can also work for him.

If a strip is not doing what it should do, which is to amuse people, nothing is sacred. I think there's been a tendency to make too radical changes . . . guys like me who come up and

think we really know it: "I'm going to make this sucker really work." I made changes that I shouldn't have because I didn't know enough at the time, and didn't know that I didn't know. I suspect that's true of other people, as well. But I don't think we should hesitate to make any changes if it seems to be necessary.

FEATURE: Was there anything that surprised you when you came back to Marvel?

O'NEIL: It's a lot bigger than it was fourteen years ago. It's a lot looser operation. Fourteen years ago it was a three person office: Stan Lee, Flo Steinberg and Roy Thomas were it. You had a lot of day-to-day, minute-to-minute contact with what was going on. It was a small enough operation. Now there's four or five editors, a magazine department, *Epic*, merchandising . . . it's become a big operation. I think Jim Shooter does a really good job of controlling the chaos, and that's his phrase, it's "controlled chaos." It seems to me that's what it should be. It's too big an operation to totally ad-lib it anymore. It has to be archived and scheduled. Yet I don't think it should be anally retentively organized. We are dealing with creative people who need some elbow room. They need an atmosphere that is not oppressive to work in. You should be willing to fool around once in a while and make jokes.

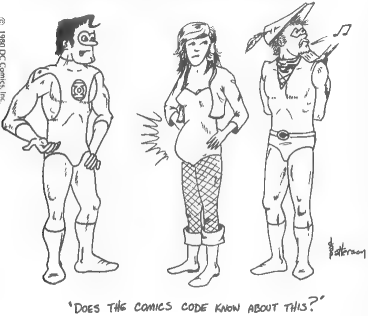
FEATURE: Are there any Marvel characters you'd be interested in handling at some point?

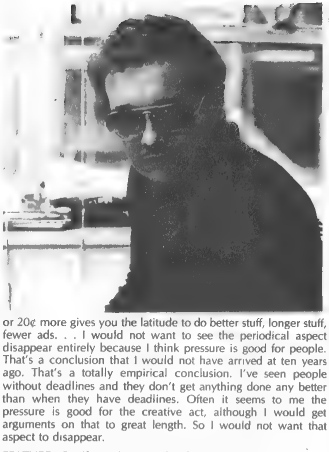
O'NEIL: I'd like to try all of them sooner or later. There's not a clinker in the line-up. I can't think of a single Marvel character other than Sgt. Fury whom I'd have qualms about trying.

FEATURE: One last question: What do you think is the potential of the medium? Where would you like to see it go?

O'NEIL: Ten years ago I could have answered that. I was so much older then; I'm younger than that now.

I don't know. I'm making it up as I go along. I'm not too concerned with the future, either in my life or in the medium I'm working in. I try to do each job as it comes along and make it interesting for myself, whoever else is involved, and try to do it well. I suspect . . . okay, here's my pontification on that subject: it seems to me that comics are no longer the lowest common denominator entertainment. Television is. I think comics are evolving an audience for comic books, for what this particular medium does that no other medium does. The audience likes comics for what comics intrinsically are. It will probably move further in that direction and, therefore, probably move further away from the cheapest possible publishing format, to books and the things we're now doing. Charging 10¢




Dean Mullaney

or 20¢ more gives you the latitude to do better stuff, longer stuff, fewer ads. . . . I would not want to see the periodical aspect disappear entirely because I think pressure is good for people. That's a conclusion that I would not have arrived at ten years ago. That's a totally empirical conclusion. I've seen people without deadlines and they don't get anything done any better than when they have deadlines. Often it seems to me the pressure is good for the creative act, although I would get arguments on that to great length. So I would not want that aspect to disappear.

FEATURE: So if comics are developing a more specialized audience that may be more sophisticated, does this mean they will lose some of the archetypal quality that reflects all society that they used to have? And instead come around more to expressing personal viewpoints of the writer, and is that a good thing?

O'NEIL: If they remain a periodical medium, they will have to appeal to a large number of people. However, the audience in comics is already under a million and that's counting passed-on readership. The actual sales are way under a million and the most popular characters are probably read by fewer than a million people a month. If a television show only attracts thirty million, it's a failure. There's a line in there where you have to appeal to a pretty broad spectrum, but maybe a slightly more literate audience than that which has traditionally been associated with comics. You have to read the damn things. They require you bringing more to them than sitting in front of a television set. It's going to be an audience which covers a wide spectrum of social and political conviction and yet which has in common a liking for that peculiar grammar that is the combination of word and image that is what comic books are. In fancy lectures I call it the "ubergrammar" of comic books. It's where the word and the image are two elements of the same linguistic unit. If you respond to that, no matter what your social or political beliefs are, you will like comics. For example, Rick Marschall and I are about as far apart as two human beings can possibly be in terms of what we believe, but we like some of the same stuff.

I don't know what's going to happen. Ideally, it will retain that mythological element because you still have to appeal to a lot of different people. Yet, it will find an audience in the way there is an audience that likes detective stories, that likes science fiction, that likes Victoria Holt romances.

It's going to be people who respond to the medium and who I hope will retain the same broad socio-political appeal. People who like comics for what they are rather than merely as the most accessible form of entertainment.

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The Silver Age of Comics: Part III

by Murray R. Ward

In this, the third installment of our "History of the Silver Age of Comics," we come to the year 1961 and the introduction of Marvel Comics Group to the superhero scene. So sit back and let your mind wander back nineteen years to a time when John Kennedy was President, television sets were tuned to The Twilight Zone, *and the New York Yankees and Cincinnati Reds were fighting it out in the World Series.*

1961.

They called it "the year that looks good no matter how you look at it." (Turn the number upside-down and you'll get the joke, then try to figure how long it will be 'till the next year you can pull that gag.)

In the world of comics, it was a landmark year, but as with most history, it would not be recognized as such until after the fact. This was hardly inexcusable, since for the first seven months of the year, almost every major event in comics was part of a previously-established trend.

Of the long-time big guns, Superman had gotten his first giant reprint Annual the previous summer (this collector remembers it selling out in his area in *one day*), and such "annuals" were now a quarterly occurrence. Batman predictably followed suit with *his* first Annual the next summer, *Showcase* graduated Lois Lane the summer after that, and Flash the summer after that. Meanwhile, back where the Silver Age started, in *Showcase*, a berth in that title had become a ticket to instant stardom, as Rip Hunter—Time Master, Sea Devils, and Aquaman were promoted from its pages to titles of their own. The Golden Age superhero revivals continued as well: a new Atom with size-changing powers made his bow next in *Showcase*, and a new Hawkman and Hawkgirl of alien origins debuted in *The Brave and the Bold* (interspersed with such less-successful stalwarts as the Suicide Squad and Cave Carson).

At the same time, the already established revivals gathered an ever-larger audience: Flash, Green Lantern, Lois Lane, and Justice League of America all moved quickly from bi-monthly status to eight times a year. If this seems inconsequential today, when everything seems to come out monthly from day one, it must be remembered that under DC's curious system of the 1950s and 1960s, even *Superman* and *Batman* were only eight-times-a-year titles. Only the flagship titles of the line, *Action*, *Detective*, and *Adventure* were monthlies, even when the latter was given over entirely to the relatively unknown *Legion of Super-Heroes*, a spin-off series from *Superboy*. (Thus, *The Legion*, from its inception as a feature, appeared with greater frequency than either its star member, Superboy, in his own book, or the Justice League, a team whose members were certainly more recognizable to the buying public than the likes of Cosmic Boy and Bouncing Boy. But what logic could one expect of a company whose annuals came out every three months?)

Nor was DC entirely alone in its revival of costumed crusaders. *The Fly*, begun by Simon and Kirby, continued as a regular title from Radio Comics, the home of *Archie*, and while the new Shield floundered after two issues of *The Double Life of Private Strong*, a new hero, the Jaguar, replaced him starring in his own title. Jaguar, Fly, and the latter's female counterpart, Fly Girl, alternated as back-ups in Archie's anthology titles, *Laugh* and *Pep*, which had been superhero books during the 1940s under the MLJ banner.

Even the most forward-looking fans, those who knew fandom from their association with its sf predecessor, and who knew comics and superheroes because they had been readers since the Golden Age of the 1940s, could not, however, predict what was to come next. Aside from the fannish endeavors themselves, nothing really new had happened in 1961 . . .for seven months. In the eighth month (November was the *cover date*, you purists), an undistinguished little item appeared on the newsstands, looking for all the world like yet another of the "monster" books that Atlas had been churning out for years. In later times, collectors would gather to compare their collections and contrast the degree of blackness within the monster's maw on the cover of this book as a hallmark of its mint condition; at the time of its publication, anyone who accidentally stumbled across a copy would have to look twice before noticing that one of the heroes depicted on the cover was the reincarnation of yet another 1940s star, Timely's Human Torch. Examining it further, he might note that another of the heroes had powers resembling those of Quality's Plastic Man, the third was perhaps related to Harvey's short-lived heroine of the early 1950s, Invisible Scarlet O'Neill, and the fourth . . .was a creature as monstrous, if not as large, as large, as the quartet's gaping-jowled adversary. Still, a lot of people must have taken that second look, because that lackluster little title by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, and its dozens of spiritual descendants are still with us today. The book, of course, was *The Fantastic Four*, and as the catch-phrase goes, "the world would never be the same again."

Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Girl, the Human Torch, and the Thing, more familiarly known as Reed Richards, Susan Storm, Johnny Storm, and Ben Grimm, were, to say the least, a different breed of costumed characters. Like all superhero teams before and since, they were, as the opening of 1967's Hanna-Barbera animated version put it, "united in their fight against interplanetary evil." But unlike the rock-hewed Nazi-crushers of the 1940s and DC's recycled stalwarts of the present, *these* characters were real *characters*. Their real names were as familiar to their public as their superdoer "code-names." This was because, like the Challengers of the Unknown, that other Kirby team whose origin story the FF's expanded upon, they nonchalantly disdained the long-held convention of secret identities. The

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Flash 123: New Earths to Conquer

[illegible] the writer of the for- [illegible] identified as being a [illegible] psychically "tuned in" on real extra-dimensional events during his dreams and fic[illegible]

The immediate implications of this revolutionary revelation was that virtually all the forties heroes most notably the heroes that the old Flash associated with: the Justice Society) were located on this alternate Earth. Seven issues later, in the second story teaming the alternate Flashes, this parallel world was given a name: "Earth-Two" The DC [illegible] be the same.

[illegible] #37) the Justice Society made their first appearance since *All-Star Comics*' cancellation in 1951, and within a year [illegible]

[illegible] ng Ea[illegible] new details were annexed to the original concept. One of the earliest gimmicks involved "parallel destiny," which meant that since the [illegible] would [illegible] certain things occuring on one [illegible] "eventually" happen on the other. In *Flash* #129, a comet releases deadly energy into Earth-Two's sun, prompting the original Flash to come to Earth-One for a means to counteract it.

Sure enough, at an unspecified time afterward (decidedly not twenty years later), a comet does crash into Earth-One's sun. his parallel destiny trick was phased out over the years as writers discovered its inherent plot limitations.

However, the notion that there was a [illegible] me differential of twenty years was an [illegible] ea that became murkier as various writers tried to work with it. In *Flash* #123 a [illegible] hewspapaer that Barry Allen picks up on [illegible] arth-Two reaveals the date to be the [illegible] ame one as on Earth-One, meaning if [illegible] there was indeed a time-difference it could only be a matter of hours. In a later story (*JLA* #82), it was asserted that due to a slower vibration rate on Earth-Two, time passed slightly more slowly, and Earth-Two would reach "mankind's ultimate destiny—or ultimate doom—twenty years later than the creatures of Earth-One." Apparently this meant that at the end of eternity, the two worlds would be twenty years out of sync, but as least at present according to *Flash* #123) the synchonization difference was less than a day.

[illegible] the Post-Infinite [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

reader.

Earth-S (*JLA* #135) is the world where the Fawcett heroes of the nineteen-forties dwelled, Captain Marvel and friends.

Earth-8, a designation that initially appeared in the controversial *Treatise on Reality in Comic Literature* by Mark Gruenwald in 1976 as the world where editor Murry Boltinoff's apocryphal tales of DC heroes occured, which were infamous for violating mainstream continuity, was years later acknowledged by DC text columnist Bob Rozakis to be part of the DC mythos.

As one might discern, the DC Mythos thus became in its twenty years of modern existence quite a complex and cumbersome (albiet interesting) cosmos. DC is the only publisher who has such a mythos. Marvel Comics' forties heroes were simply said to have existed in their mainstream world's past. (Marvel's alternate world stories are largely confined to a single title, *What If*, rather than being a pervasive common element throughout the mythos.)

Perhaps one of the problems with the DC mythos *is* this complexity. A plethora of alternate realms of existence may be difficult for a new reader to grasp. (When *Action Comics* featured the wedding of the Earth-Two Superman and Lois Lane, writers in magazines such as *Playboy* and *Newsweek* apparently had a bit of difficulty understanding the distinction.)

More problematic to long-time readers is that the reason for the institution of the parallel Earth scenario has not helped the present dilemma with the comics' verisimilitude. Consider: the first superheroic age lasted from 1938 to 1951, approximately thirteen years. The second superheroic age started in 1959 and has continued without interruption to the present, over twenty years. The Earth-Two heroes were active one decade, inactive for another, and then resumed activity. During that decade layoff, most of the heroes were said to have aged (the notable exception being Black Canary). The Earth-One heroes have had no such layoffs. The Justice League has been in existence for twenty years by our time, at least, since there have been various assertions that comic book time does not correspond to real time). Even contracting that period to half that, the question beomes *which* ten years have the Justice League been active in? 1960 through 1970, or 1970 through 1980? If it is the latter, are we to believe that the Earth-Two heroes were inactive twenty years instead of ten? How does one deal with characters remaining approximately the same age throughout their comic book careers?

Some critics suggest the issue is best ignored. If you care about that kind of thing, they argue, you're too old to be reading comic books anyway. Others propose solutions, such as consigning portions of a character's past to oblivion (that is, they didn't really happen even if you do remember reading them when you were young or still have them in your collection).

Perhaps the solution that would best set things aright (at least for ten years) is to start all over again with a new parallel Earth, just as DC did in 1959. Imagine that one month every DC comic would publish an origin story for its lead hero (amending any aspect of the heroes' legends as desired) and proceed from there as if this were an all-new character, different from the one of the issue before, as different as Barry Allen was from Jay Garrick, or as editor Jack Schiff's science fiction Batman was from Julius Schwartz's detective version. When the hero encountered one of his foes, it would be portrayed as the first time the two met. Overnight all of DC's mythos-continuity problems would vanish (for at least ten years when it would probabably be high time to start over again) and writers and editors would have a clean slate to work with. This time perhaps, the heroes of the new Earth-One would not meet the heroes of the old 1960's-1970's Earth-One to complicate matters.

Admittedly, it seems unlikely, despite DC's recent efforts to redefine the canon of the mythos with *The World of Krypton* and *Legend of Batman* mini-series, that the powers-that-be would ever initiate such a revolutionary face-lift. It would probably take a catastrophe such as the crisis of the fifties to draw the current superheroic age to a close.

But whether the DC mythos magically simplifies itself, or keeps accumulating errata through the 80's and 90's and beyond, the DC Mythos as we know it is all a legacy of *Flash* #123.

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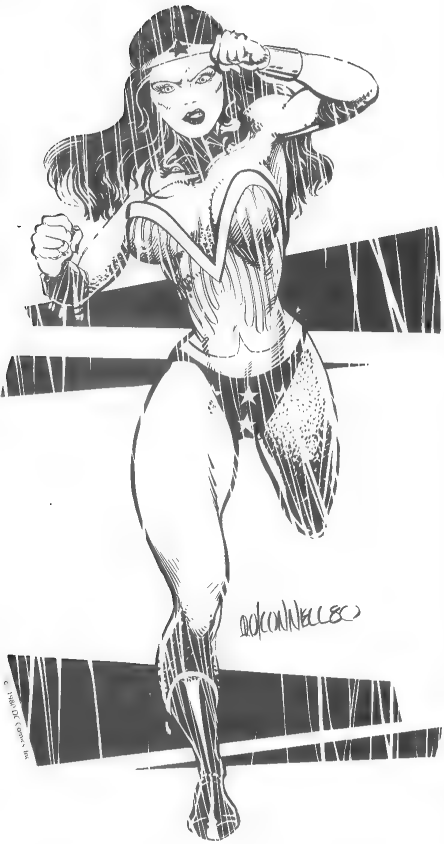

world in which their adventures took place, a world very like our own but which gradually became the unique Marvel Universe of today, recognized the FF members as celebrities on a level with movie stars. For the first two issues, the team also made do without the traditional colorful costumes, sallying forth to do battle in ordinary street clothes. Even when, in their third outing, fashion-minded Sue decked them out in matching blue longjohns, the Thing promptly tore his to shreds, along with a mask that concealed his monstrous visage, and never wore more than trunks again. Instead of the hidden cave, mountain, island, or arctic fortresses of the DC heroes, the FF operated out of a well-known skyscraper in midtown Manhattan, in the style of pulp hero Doc Savage.

But the biggest difference between these first Marvel heroes and their predecessors was their characterization, a commodity that was unheard of in comics to that date. The characters inter-reacted. Sure, Reed Richards was a "mad scientist" type who could pull impossible world-saving machines out of his hat at a moment's notice, but he had as much trouble keeping sweet Sue interested in him romantically as the lowliest prepubescent. Johnny, on the other hand, dated a different girl every night with no traumas whatsoever, but having super-human powers didn't automatically grant him maturity and he pulled some boners that would have done Archie Andrews proud. Nor was Sue immediately "liberated" of her tendency to behave, in her own words, "like a silly female" from time to time, by her acquisition of super-abilities. Ben was, of course, a monster, unable to change back to human form at will like his teammates. For him there would be no happy endings in the accustomed superhero style; being a superhero was in itself a curse, not a blessing.

And so the Fantastic Four did not tend to gather chummily like modern-day Knights of the Round Table and talk shop while deciding which dragons needed slaying. Instead, they argued among themselves . . .and argued, and argued, long into the night. In another scenario reminiscent of *Doc Savage*, Johnny and Ben played elaborate gags on each other in the time-honored style of Ham Brooks and Monk Mayfair. These shenanigans, or a display of Ben's temper owing to his despair at his continuing plight, would quickly involve the entire team in a headquarters-wrecking free-for-all at

Fantastic Four

by Jimmie Shannon

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The twentieth anniversary of the Marvel Universe is not that far away. During the past nineteen years to be exact, the Marvel Comics Group not only underwent a major name change from Atlas to Marvel), several ownership changes and far too many editorial changes, but eventually toppled DC as the perennially best-selling comics line. While Superman, the Batman and Wonder Woman retain a high identification factor with the American public, among comics readers such newer heroes as Spider-Man, the Hulk and the Fantastic Four have surpassed the old stalwarts.

The Fantastic Four were an odd lot from their beginnings in 1961. They appeared in street clothes and not costumes in their first two adventures (going the homogeneously clad Challengers one better), achieved and thrived on the celebrity status afforded them by their fictional public and bickered among themselves in a manner which theretofore was not accepted behavior among superheroes.

The Fantastic Four broke with the proven superhero formulae and the innovations brought to the series by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were a welcome change to the reader. While the DC lettercolumns ran suggestions about what real-life actors could play its characters in a "dream film" (Ed Byrnes as Snapper Carr!), the Fantastic Four were making a movie in the pages of their own comic (issue 4). Little did they realize, at the outset that the "movie mogul" who invited them to Hollywood was none other than the Sub-Mariner! Or, which DC characters at the time would have been featured in anything like issue 11's "A Day with the Fantastic Four," in which the FF were seen on a day without any crisis? Yes, *The Fantastic Four* was indeed a different type of comic.

Because their identities were known to all, none of the secret-identity problems which were often served as springboards for stories in the DC mythos were to be found in *The Fantastic Four*. Anyone who wanted to try to get a peek at his favorite heroes could stroll up to the Baxter Building in midtown Manhattan and wait his turn. The Fantastic Four had other problems to keep them busy.

The friendly, and sometimes not so friendly, disagreements between the various members have long since turned to shtick, but at the beginning, they were a refreshing change. Johnny Storm and Ben Grimm, although of greatly different ages, acted out a sibling rivalry which, to this date, has not been duplicated by another pair of characters. Reed Richards, although your bonafide genius, had a hard time expressing his love for fellow member Sue Storm. Sue, on the other hand, had her own difficulties trying to decide whose affections she would return. Reed's or (perish the thought) a villain's - the Sub-Mariner's. This triangle among Sue, Reed and Namor offered a new twist to the superhero romantic game - a far cry from the Clark Kent/Lois Lane syndrome.

The group's adversaries were also cut from a different mold. Issue 1's Mole Man is a fine example scorned by his peers because of his ugly physical appearance, he vented his frustration in a demented desire for revenge on all mankind. Or Doctor Doom, perhaps the quintessential villain of all time. Unlike the one-dimensional DC villains, Doom was given depth. Granted, he was a power hungry despot, but he was also noble. He was a man of his word. Also, the twist of being a head of state granted him diplomatic immunity, which has caused the FF not a little frustration over the years. And then there was the Sub-Mariner, who even in the 1940s, was half villain, half hero.

Another factor in the creative success of *The Fantastic Four* was obviously Jack Kirby's art. Although Kirby's true heyday was still a few years away, the dynamics of his figures and compositions made a dramatic difference from the more staid DC art. Again, what is commonplace today was innovative at the time. Kirby's art jumped out of the page at the reader.

It's strange what nineteen years can bring; the innovations brought to comics by Lee and Kirby's *Fantastic Four* have long since become standard, and as more and more creations came from the "House of Ideas," those same innovations turned into shticks just as DC's formulae became repetitious. Yet, *The Fantastic Four* started what would soon come to be called "The Marvel Age of Comics."

least once every other issue.

Much of this was still in the offing in those first issues in 1961, but the groundwork was laid. *The Fantastic Four* was the first of many Marvel success stories to come, and the ongoing history of the Marvel Universe, a world like and yet unlike DC's Earth-1 and Earth-2, had begun to be chronicled.

Earth-1? Earth-2? Unheard-of terms in 1961, but the fact that the DC stories of the Silver Age and the Golden Age took place on two separate worlds was established in what was immediately hailed by fans as *the* comic of the summer: *Flash* #123. In the first Alley Awards poll, flash and its creative staff swept away all honors, thanks mainly to the story "Flash of Two Worlds" by Gardner Fox, which had Barry Allen, the first of Julius Schwartz's revival heroes, meeting his counterpart of the 1940s, Jay Garrick, the original Flash. The names Earth-1, Earth-2, ad infinitum, for the various comic book Earths, the revival of the Justice Society of America, and their annual get-together with the JLA would all come later but like *FF*#1, *Flash*#123 was a milestone and the four-color "father" of many 32-page children to come.

1962.

At DC, trends, or what are now observable as trends through hindsight, continued. Superman, Batman, and their respective "families" continued, occupying some nine titles among them, not counting the Annuals, and not counting *Justice League*, where the Man of Steel and Caped Crusader now appeared far more regularly than in the earlier issues. The Justice League itself continued, with an ever-enlarging cast of members. Flash and Green Lantern continued to prosper; the Atom made the jump into his own title, while Hawkman, not as quick to catch on, got a second shot in *Brave and Bold*. (He would eventually share *Mystery in Space* with Adam Strange before finally getting a book of his own.) The Metal Men, an all-new group of robot heroes created by Robert Kanigher, debuted in *Showcase*.

At Marvel, as Atlas began to call itself, a different pattern emerged. While DC would test-market their new concepts *Showcase*-fashion before committing a regular title to their new heroes' exploits, Marvel's method of playing it safe was to introduce their super-stars as features in their already-extant monster comics. Thus, if a new character bombed, he could be instantly recalled and not drag the magazine down into oblivion with him.

Why this inordinate caution, after the obvious success of *The Fantastic Four* on their own? Because Marvel's second try at an original super-character title, believe it or not, was something less than successful, and it set them back on their heels a bit. It was cited as a rip-off of the FF itself, the series concept floundered about in search of a direction it never achieved, and the book died unceremoniously after six issues. Its name: *The Incredible Hulk*. That selfsame Hulk who today is the star of TV, magazine, and hamburger stand openings, was a colossal failure on his opening night. To Lee and Kirby's credit, they tried everything before they threw in the towel: changing the Hulk's skin color from gray to green in the second issue for greater visual appeal, playing up sidekick Rick Jones, warping the monster's personality from mindless marauder to unspeaking robot to Thing-like tough-guy to Bruce-Banner-with-muscles. Nothing worked, or rather, everything worked for one issue, but each issue differed from the one before.

Before the Hulk could make it big, as he finally did, he had to go the route that every other early Marvel solo star did: being promoted from the ranks of the monster comics. (In retrospect, it seems ironic that the only character in the line-up who actually *was* a monster did not start there in the first place.) Thus, Henry Pym, the protagonist of an anthology shocker, became Ant-Man, a size-changer like the Atom, and was given the regular feature in *Tales to Astonish*. A Norse god was reincarnated on Earth in an origin tale reminiscent of Fawcett's Captain Marvel, and Thor became the star of *Journey into Mystery*. The FF's Human Torch spun off into his own solo series in *Strange Tales*. And as *Amazing Fantasy* lay dying, Lee and Steve Ditko devoted its final issue to another newcomer, the Amazing Spider-Man.

Needless to say, by taking a tack almost diametrically opposed to that of the FF, "Spidey" became Marvel's second big hit, and was immediately awarded his own book. A human character with human failings like the other Marvel stars, Spider-Man was more the typical superhero, and as such, atypical in the Marvel world. He had a secret identity, he was a loner, he was unknown and untrusted and never to be a celebrity like the FF. Stan Lee called him "the superhero *you* would be if *you* were a superhero." In this, he read the reader mentality well. The football hero/jock typified by Flash Thompson, rival of Spider-Man's civilian self, student Peter Parker, was not the average comics or science fiction fan. The readers of *Spider-Man* were frail or shy or bookish or wore glasses or had trouble making friends and getting dates. In short, they were just like Peter Parker. What Superboy's Clark Kent pretended to be, Parker actually was. Only becoming Spidey gave him the incentive and the experience of the world to cure the personality defects of his Parker self. Conversely, since Spidey *was* Peter, the Web-spinner never won a battle easily. Ditko depicted him as an unbelievably agile acrobat, almost triple-jointed at times, yet Spidey took more pratfalls than the Three Stooges. The very nature of his powers, the abilities of a human-sized arachnid, scared off as many friends as Parker's introvertedness. DC heroes, as they came along, were invited to join the Justice League as a matter of course; Spider-Man tried to join the FF in his first issue, and they almost threw him out on his ear. If Superman was a God figure, Spider-Man was a Woody Allen crying "Why me, Lord?", and the fans loved him for it.

Meanwhile, new superheroes were springing up from a totally unexpected source. In July 1962, comic readers sauntered into their newsstands and drugstores to discover the familiar funny-animal characters of Walt Disney, Warner Brothers, Walter Lantz, MGM, Hanna-Barbera, and all the others being produced under a new banner. Dell Comics was gone and in their stead was Gold Key Comics. Along with such short-lived experiments as quarterly giant-sized issues *every* issue (a gambit Tower would try three years later), borderless panels, and square pointerless word balloons, Gold Key also ventured into the realm of the super-powered action hero. Thus, such titles as *Magnus, Robert Fighter*, and *Dr. Solar, Man of the Atom* were added to the slowly growing galaxy of 1960s super-people.

As the year ended, DC continued doing business as usual, the Gold Key titles made ready to release what would be the last of their regular giants, Spider-Man's first issue hit the stands, and the last surviving "straight" Marvel monster book gained a resident superhero, as Iron Man bowed in *Tales of Suspense*.

(Next issue we explore the events of 1963, a busy year in comics: The Avengers are created, and among other things, the newer Marvel creations such as Spider-Man and Thor begin their development. All this, in issue 5 of Comics Feature.*)*

20 Years Ago this Month

10¢
SUPERMAN'S PAL
JIMMY OLSEN
featuring
JIMMY OLSEN, ORPHAN!"
GOLLY, I ESS SUPERMAN IS TERRIFIC! HOW I WISH HE'D ADOPT ME SO THAT I COULD BE HIS PAL! BUT I'M NOBODY! JUST AN ORPHAN WHO DOESN'T EVEN KNOW HIS OWN NAME!
JIMMY'S AMNESIA HAS MADE HIM FORGET HIS ENTIRE PAST! AND NOT EVEN I, SUPERGIRL, CAN HELP HIM!
APPROVED BY COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

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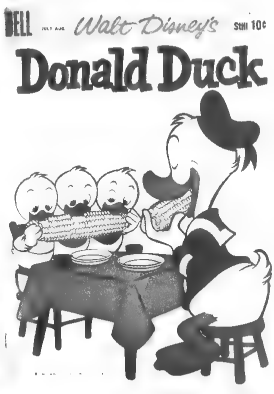

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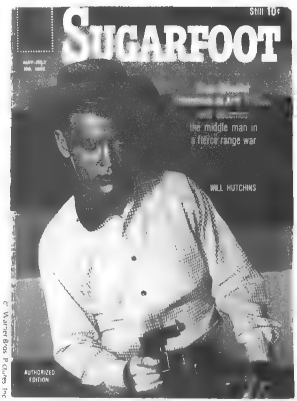

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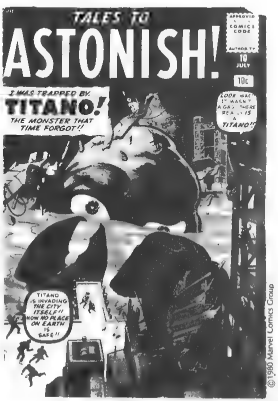
TALES TO ASTONISH!
APPROVED BY COMICS CODE
10¢
I WAS TRAPPED BY:
TITANO!
THE MONSTER THAT TIME FORGOT!!
LOOK! WAIT! I HAVE TWO ARMS, TOO!
TITANO!!
TITANO IS INVADING THE CITY ITSELF!! NOW NO PLACE ON EARTH IS SAFE!!

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MARVEL COMICS

The following comics bear a ***January*** cover date and will be on sale in ***October*** (September shipping schedule)

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #71 — Script by RALPH MACCHIO and MARK GRUENWALD. Art by RON WILSON and GENE DAY. The awesome ***Inhumans*** and ***Mr. Fantastic*** himself join the **Thing** to battle the all-new evil entity called Maelstrom!

STAR TREK #10 — Script by MARTIN PASKO. Art by DAVE COCKRUM and KLAUS JANSON. In 23rd Century space, the crew of the *U.S.S. Enterprise* comes face-to-face with their ***weirdest*** adversary yet!

SPIDEY SUPER STORIES #50 — Still goin' strong after half a hundred issues! Mighty Marvel and the Electric Company present easy-to-read tales filled with that ol' web-slingin' magic

DAREDEVIL #168 — Written by ROGER McKENZIE. Art by FRANK MILLER and KLAUS JANSON. Daredevil and the pulsatin' ***Punisher*** team up to find out the secret behind the Angel Dust Murders!

MARVEL SUPER HEROES #94 — Re-printing Hulk #143 written by THOMAS with art by AYERS and J. SEVERIN. Enter *Doctor Doom!*

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #212 — Script by DENNY O'NEIL. Art by JOHN ROMITA JR. and JOE SINNOTT. As of yet we are sadly unaware of the specific details of this month's adventure in our senior Spider-Man magazine, but in view of the enormous talent and time-tested integrity of Messrs. Romita, O'Neil, and Sinnott, we feel safe in advising its purchase and perusal. Enough elucidated!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #253 — Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by JOHN BYRNE. Inks by JOE RUBINSTEIN. What ever happened to Cap's WWII allies, the ***Invaders?*** And to their deadliest arch-foe (we're not tellin' who!)? This one's got the answers!

THOR #303 — Script by DOUG MOENCH. Pencils by RICK LEONARDI (watch him — he's hot!). Inks by CHIC STONE. Cover by KEITH POLLARD. A moving tale of faith and its loss, the machinations of the Mob, and the power of the god of Thunder.

GHOST RIDER #52 — Story by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Art by DON PERLIN. A demon plots to forever trap Johnny Blaze in the body of the Ghost Rider — and thereby make the brimstone biker his helpless pawn!

SHE-HULK #12 — Written by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT. Art by MIKE VOSBURG and DANNY BULANADI. Cover by MICHAEL GOLDEN. While the She-Hulk must battle the twin menace of Gemini, Jennifer Walters fights her own courtroom battle to defend mass-murderer and former vampire *Michael Morbius!*

MOON KNIGHT #3 — Written by DOUG MOENCH. Pencils by BILL SIENKIEWICZ. "Midnight Means Murder!" pits Moonie against an art thief whose motives are more ***sinister*** than mere greed!

SPIDER-WOMAN #34 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Pencils by STEVE LEIALOHA. Hammer and Anvil almost defeated the *Hulk!* How can the Web Lady hope to stand up against them?

INCREDIBLE HULK #255 — Script by BILL MANTLO. Art by SAL BUSCEMA. On the sun-scorched streets of Tel Aniv, the green Golem's mettle is tested by *Sabra*, Israel's super-heroine!

AVENGERS #203 — Script by DAVID MICHELINIE. Art by GEORGE PEREZ and DAN GREEN. Final showdown with Ultron!

CONAN #118 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Art by JOHN BUSCEMA and ERNIE CHAN. From beyond the stars comes a strange sorcerer bent on transforming all of earth into a vision of *hell!*

MARVEL TALES #123 — Re-presenting Spider-Man #146. Script by CONWAY; Art by ANDRU and ROMITA II. If the Scorpion didn't wanna get Spidey mad — he shouldn't have threatened Aunt May in her hospital bed! Look out!

MARVEL'S GREATEST COMICS #96 — Reprinting Fantastic Four #116, written by GOODWIN with art by J. BUSCEMA and SINNOTT. To defeat the Over-Mind, the FF join forces with . . . ***Doctor Doom!***

X-MEN #141 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Art by JOHN BYRNE and TERRY AUSTIN. An almost unbearable responsibility falls upon the newest — and youngest — X-Man, *Kitty Pryde*, as she must journey alone to the past in order to save the future!

TALES TO ASTONISH #14 — Reprints Sub-Mariner #14. Script by THOMAS. Art by M. SEVERIN and ESPOSITO. Subby in a novel-length battle against the ***original Human Torch!***

ROM #14 — Story by BILL MANTLO. Art by SAL BUSCEMA. Cover by MICHAEL GOLDEN. The Spaceknight pits his unearthly skills against the super-brain of the Mad Thinker (aided and abetted by the brutal strength of his awesome Android)!

FANTASY MASTERPIECES #14 — Reprints Silver Surfer #14, written by LEE with art by J. BUSCEMA and ADKINS. The Surfer vs. ***Spider-Man!*** Plus, from Warlock #11 with story and layout by STARLIN and finishes by LEIALOHA, "The Strange Death of Adam Warlock!"

MAN-THING #8 — Story by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Art by DON PERLIN and BOB WIACEK. The muck-monster's sky-high showdown with *Captain Fate!* Plus, the strange destiny of Sheriff John Daltry!

COMING ATTRACTIONS

MICRONAUTS #25 — Written by BILL MANTLO Art by PAT BRODERICK and ARMANDO GIL. Hyora's mission for *Mentallo* and the *Freer* Capture the Micronauts! Plus: *Tales of the Microverse*, featuring **Baron Karza**'s wrath filled return and his unbelievable theft of the *Enigma Force!*

FANTASTIC FOUR #226 — Story by DOUG MOENCH Pencils by BILL SIENKIEWICZ Inks by JOE SINNOTT. *Richard Carson, Genji Odashu*, and *Ilango Savage* — their giant robot-warriors destroyed — lie at the mercy of the deadly Samurai Destroyer and only the FF can save them!

MARVEL TEAM-UP #101 — Story by J M DeMATTEIS Art by JERRY BINGHAM and MIKE ESPOSITO. How much action can you stand? How much excitement can you take? This teaming of **Spidey** with the Defenders' high flying **Nighthawk** delivers all you could want — and more!

IRON MAN #142 — Story by DAVID MICHELINIE Art by JOHN ROMITA, JR. and BOB LAYTON. Someone has *murdered* an entire Iowa town and the armored Avenger vows to find out who — and *why!*

PETER PARKER #50 — Script by ROGER STERN Pencils by MARIE SEVERIN The return of the guaranteed most *unexpected* Spidey foes of all! Plus: the Smuggler!

DEFENDERS #91 — Script by ED HANNIGAN Pencils by DON PERLIN Unbelievable but true: Helicat and Valkyrie turn against each other! Could it have anything to do with the Mandrill's all-out last stand?

MARVEL SUPER-ACTION #27 — Re-presenting Avengers #66, written by ROY THOMAS with art by BARRY SMITH and SYD SHORES. The Avengers — betrayed from within! Plus: an all-new, daringly different *Hulk* tale from *Marvel U.K.*

AMAZING ADVENTURES #14 — Reprints X-Men #8. Story by LEE. Art by KIRBY and STONE. "Unus the Untouchable!"

STAR WARS #43 — Script by ARCHIE GOODWIN. Art by AL WILLIAMSON and CARLOS GARZON. Part V of the official comics adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back!* Features material not seen in the super-special, the paperback or the treasury

MASTER OF KUNG FU #96 — Story by DOUG MOENCH Art by MIKE ZECK and GENE DAY. Shang Chi becomes entangled in the strange and dangerous saga of Rufus Super Midnight Carter, karate champ and man of mystery!

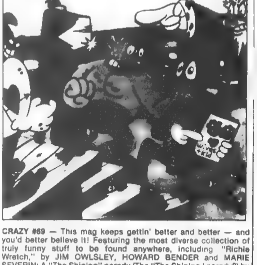
MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #10 — Script by BILL MANTLO Art by STEVE DITKO. There's double Marvel dynamite when identical twins gain the powers of *Captain Universe!*

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA #23 — Story and pencils by WALT SIMONSON Inks by KLAUS JANSON. This collectors item *last issue* features the peril of the Food Pirates and leaves the Galactica crew with a possible clue to the way back to Earth

MARVEL MAGAZINES
(Cover dated December)

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #59 — How could we ever top the *Sword of Skelos* Trilogy we finished last issue? Try us this month and find out! We promise — you won't be disappointed. Barbarian's honor!

HULK #24 — Cover by JOE JUSKO. The green Goliath stars in a tale of political upheaval and all-out action, entitled, "The Man Who Would Be President!", written by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT with pencils by GENE COLAN, inks by ALFREDO ALCALA, and color by STEVE OLIFF. Then, in 1937 Hollywood, Domino Fortune proceeds to get himself in even more trouble as he faces nonsense gangsters, a malevolent giant, and a child movie-star with a gruesome secret! It's written by DENNY O'NEIL, with more betcha-can't-look-at-just-one painting by HOWARD CHAYKIN. And don't miss LORA BYRNE's "It's Not Easy Being Green," a sensational feature about Norman Leavitt, the magical make-up man who transforms Lou Ferrigno into TV's Hulk. *Profusely illustrated*



CRAZY #69 — This mag keeps gettin' better and better — and you'd better believe it! Featuring the most diverse collection of truly funny stuff to be found anywhere, including "Richie Wretch," by JIM OWSLEY, HOWARD BENDER and MARIE SEVERIN; A "The Shining" parody (The "The Shining" parody?) by PAUL KUPPERBERG and GARY HALGREN; and contributions by DAVID ALLIKAS, DAVE MORRIS, BOB TOOMEY, JOSÉ ALBELO, MELANIE SHORIN, ARNOLDO FRANCHIONI, MURAD GUMEN and KENT GAMBLE. Plus, Obnoxio's contest results, Teen-Hulk (penciled by MARIE SEVERIN), and Howard the Duck!

MARVEL SPECIAL EDITION

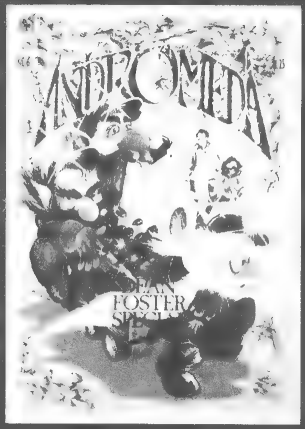
SPIDER-MAN AND THE HULK SUMMER INSERT — Written by STAN LEE and JIM SHOOTER. Art by JIM MOONEY and MIKE ESPOSITO. Cover by JOHN ROMITA. Available now on a limited basis to comic collectors, this all-new mini-comic originally appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*. Features an all-new 10 page Spidey-Hulk tale plus the *origins* of these two titans of Marveldom!

While we will never knowingly print inaccurate information in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause. —The Bullpen

ANDROMEDA

NUMBER 6!

"...the closest thing to real SCIENCE FICTION yet published... Intelligent, well drawn, entertaining..." —MEDIASCENE



Special all ALAN DEAN FOSTER issue!

METROGNOME illustrated by Tom Nesbitt,
WHY JOHNNY CAN'T SPEED illustrated by Peter Hsu,
THRUST illustrated by Don Marshall and more!

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ARIK KAHN 1: @ $1.00 plus .25 postage per copy.
ARIK KAHN 2-3: @ $1.25 plus .25 postage per copy.
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The Fandom Zone

A complete section of useful information, fanzine reviews and columns geared to you, the involved comics fan

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Fandom Almanac

Comics Clubs

If you belong to a comics club and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE.

Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P. O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Don Coopman, 131 Monterey Drive, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2Y 7A9.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Neil Cohen, 3824 N. 15th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 227-8701.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eide's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1A8.

Conventions

If you are running a convention, or know of one in your area, and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE.

July 4-6. NEW YORK COMIC ART CONVENTION. New York Statler Hilton, 7th Ave & 33rd St. Guests: Harlan Ellison, Mike Kaluta, Wendy Pini, Hembeck, Boris, Bob Kane, etc. Admission: $5/day, or $12.50/three days in advance. Contact: Sea Gate Distributors, 65-14 20th Ave., Bklyn, NY 11204.

Jul. 5-6. COMIC BOOK AND COLLECTIBLE SHOW. The Eastwood Mall, Route 422 & 46, Niles, OH. Hours: 7/5: 10–9, 7/6: 12–5. Contact: Rainbow Comics, 6000 Mahoning Ave., room 202, Austintown Plaza, Austintown, OH 44515.

Jul. 12–13. MEDIACON. Indianapolis Convention Center, Indiana. Films include: Goldfinger, Psycho, Young Frankenstein; and the complete serials of Capt. Marvel and Flash Gordon. Admission to huckster area: $1.50/day, $2.00/both days; including films: $4.00/day, $7.00/both days. Contact: John Horton, 10. S Weinbach, Evansville, IN 47714.

July 18-20. CHICAGO COMICON. Pick Congress Hotel, 520 S. Michigan Ave. Guest of Honor: Roy Thomas; other guests include Marshall Rogers and others. Contact: Chicago Comicon, 1219a W. Devon, Chicago, IL 60660.

July 26-27. CREATION PHILADELPHIA. Phila. Sheraton, 17th & JFK Blvd Admission: $5/day, $9/both days. Contact: Creation: 421 7th Ave., #908, NY, NY 10001

Jul. 26—27. PAPER COLLECTIBLES EXTRAVAGANZA. Glendale Civic Auditorium, 1401 N. Verdigo Rd., Glendale, CA. Hours: 7/26: 11–9, 7/29: 11–5. Admission: $1.75/day. Contact: Cem Productions, 12737 Garvey Ave., Office "E", Baldwin Park, CA 91706.

Jul. 26 CAP-N.Y. COMIC MARKET. Tom Sawyer Inn, 1444 Western Ave., Albany, NY. Hours: 11–4. Admission: 50¢. Contact: John Iavarone, 7 Forest Ave., Albany, NY 12208.

Aug. 2–3. WESTERN MICHIGAN COMIC AND CARD SHOW. Easterbrook Mall, 3655 28th St. S.E., Grand Rapids, MI. Hours: 8/2: 10–9, 8/3: 12–5. Contact: Phantom of the Attic, 511-D E. Saginaw St., Lansing, MI 48906.

Aug. 23. CAP-N.Y. COMIC MARKET. Tom Sawyer Motor Inn, 1444 Western Ave., Albany, NY. Hours: 11–4. Admission: 50¢. Contact: John Iavarone, 7 Forest Ave., Albany, NY 12208.

Fandom Zone

by Bob Jennings

Mickey Mouse © Walt Disney Productions

This is a fanzine review column. A few points to remember: zines are rated on your basic grade school level, with A being the best and F being the worst. Plus and minus marks may be added for your further confusion. Please keep my personal prejudices in mind as you read along, and mark appropriate adjustments. I do not like amateur comic strips, fan fiction, pin up pages or interviews.

If you would like your fanzine reviewed, send a copy to—

Bob Jennings
RFD 2, Whiting Rd.
Dudley, Mass. 01610

Now, on with the show.

ARF ARF! #5

Chester Cox, P.O. Box 94, Shaw AFB, S.C. 29152, 35¢ to club members, write Chester fo easy club info, 22 pages, 8½ × 11", ditto.

Now here's an interesting idea. *Arf Arf* is a fanzine devoted entirely to Popeye. As one of the living legends of the comic universe, its about time somebody paid proper attention to the spinach-eating sailor, and Chester Cox has decided to make this project his own.

Arf Arf is a totally relaxed and unpretentious fanzine. It is filled with chatter, news and lots of information. The articles and discussions revolve around Popeye, especially the Popeye of the comic strips and comic books. There is even a Great Lost Cause to rally around. (In this case it's pretty definitely a lost cause; the idea of getting Whitman to abandon their bagged comic idea and return *Popeye Comics* to newsstand distribution.)

Popeye fans will find plenty of meat here, from Jim Korkis' news and trivia column which covers an astonishing variety of subjects, to Chester Cox's own comments and reviews of the latest Popeye doings. The letter column is loaded with interesting, informative narratives that open whole new areas for the casual browser.

The heart of this issue is an article by Rich Morrissey which discusses exactly how Popeye gets his incredible strength. The average fan probably assumes he gets it from eating a can or two of spinach, but things are not quite so simple. If Popeye can eat spinach and develop incredible super strength, then why doesn't it work for the other characters in the strip? In fact, why couldn't other members of Popeye's own family use the spinach trick to develop the same abilities? To answer these puzzling questions, Rich goes back to the very beginning, and traces Popeye from his first appearance in *Thimble Theater*, creating a very plausable explanation of the unique circumstances which affected his bodily functions. This is fascinating reading, and *must* reading for anyone curious about the whys and wherefores of comic character development.

There is plenty of other stuff here as well. It's an entertaining mix. If the fanzine has any faults, it's in its production. The ditto work is good and sharp, but the format is generally too open and loose. There seems to be a lot of wasted space that could be put to some positive use. The illos throughout are also pretty third rate. Chester desperately needs the services of a good cartoonist familiar with the Popeye legend and its supporting characters.

Still, these are relatively minor faults. *Arf Arf* is easy going and friendly. If you're looking for pomp and ceremony and super-slick graphics then you'd better go somewhere else. If you'd like an interesting, fun fanzine devoted to the world's strongest one-eyed sailor, then this one is definitely for you.

RATING B

THE HARVEY COLLECTORS NEWSLETTER #5

$1.00, Bart Bush, 114 E. Main St., Norman Okla. 73069, 16 pages, 5½ × 8¼", photo offset reduced type, published quarterly.

Here's another interesting concept: a fanzine exclusively produced for collectors of the Harvey Comics characters.

If you are like most fans, you have probably been dismissing the entire Harvey Comics line, except perhaps for the *Dick Tracy* and *Phantom* reprints, and some early hero stuff done during the war years, as worthless trash; and all without bothering to open the pages of a single Harvey humor comic past or present. In point of fact, Harvey has done extremely well over the years with their line of carefully developed funny animal and children's comics, and many of their efforts are highly readable. They are also becoming highly collectable.

There is a wide and growing audience of dedicated Harvey collectors, and this newsletter seeks to meet their needs. It not only provides articles about characters, writers and artists, but also digs out essential information about the company and the comic titles themselves. With twenty years of comics fandom behind us, there has been precious little research work done in the field of Harvey Comics. That's a lot of lost time to make up for, but editor Bart Bush is doing the best he can with a fanzine which appears to be a true labor of love.

This issue is loaded with chatty information and good background material on Harvey, both past and present. In addition to general news and information, there is a short article covering the broad-based collectable periods in the company's development. Are you familiar with the cover stamp period, or the TV screen years? Do you even know what these terms mean? Well, its all explained here, along with an evaluation of what the most desirable eras actually were and exactly why.

There is also a listing, by years, of when the various Harvey comics started, and also a breakdown of cancellation months and years. This creates an invaluable

cross section history of the entire Harvey empire. It is interesting to note, for example, that 1974 and 1976 were major cancellation years for the company, while 1962, 1972 and 1977 were major building years. A whole series of trends is evident after reading this chart.

There is also a fascinating analysis of the problems Harvey collectors have with the *Overstreet Price Guide*. The *Guide* prices, as the editor very charitably notes, are completely out of focus with reality. Why, for example, should *Casper the Friendly Ghost* issues 41 through 70 (one of Casper's more collectable periods) list for $3.00 in mint, while the early issues of *The Friendly Ghost Casper*, which appeared later and offered poorer story quality, command ridiculously higher prices? *Felix the Cat* #62 lists for low money, despite the fact that #62 happens to be a true first issue. The editor manages to make some rather telling comments here. He also brings up an interesting point dealing with the comics speculators who have suddenly swooped down on the Harvey field. If speculators succeed in driving the cost of desirable Harvey issues up too fast or before there is actually a broad base of support from serious collectors, the development of this segment of the hobby may be destroyed before it ever emerges from its formative stages. Lots of food for thought here.

A list of favorite and least favorite characters provides some insight into the preferences of the average Harvey collector, with comments and speculations about the poll results.

The major problem with *The Harvey Collectors' Newsletter* is that the publication is overpriced. I am informed that most of that dollar-per-issue price goes to pay for mailing envelopes and first class postage, but still, a buck for sixteen small sized pages is a lot. However, the information and comments offered are extremely valuable, especially for someone like myself who doesn't really know that much about Harvey Comics. In this case, the contents and service offered seems to outweigh the cost factor. If you have an interest in Harvey Comics, or even if you're just curious about their history and development, you ought to pick up a copy of this fanzine. It is, to the best of my knowledge, the *only* place you can find such information

RATING: A

COLE BLACK #1

$1.50, Rocky Hartberg, Langford, S.D. 57454, stripzine, 24 pages, 10¾×4¼", photo offset.

Well here we have the latest in a long string of amateur stripzines. Perhaps this would be a good place to explain why I am not particularly fond of amateur stripzines. Over the past few years it seems that a significent shift has occurred in the

fanzine game, with more and more of these things coming out every day. The flood has reached the point now where roughly one third of all fanzines being produced are stripzines, a trend which I frankly find appalling.

Amateur stripzines are at a competitive disadvantage as far as I am concerned. I can walk down to the corner drug store and pick up a professional comic book, which is carefully printed, and comes complete with stories written and drawn by people who know how to create an interesting, enjoyable comic-style adventure. The comic also comes in full color and costs me fifty cents.

Amateur stripzines on the other hand, usually have fewer story pages than a professional comic; they are produced in black and white, and are created by artists and writers whose work, as a general rule, is so inferior to the standards set by professional comics (or even the standards set by good fanzines) that I'm astonished the publishers ever had the guts to have the things printed and distributed in the first place. Even if the writer and artist manage to produce material which is readable, there is still the price factor. Due to the economics of small press production, amateur stripzines invariably cost lots of money, far more than any professional comic. Cover prices of a dollar, a buck and a half, or even two dollars a copy are by no means unusual these days.

And what do we get for our money? Basically we get amateur strips conceived by amateur writers who seldom know how to even properly organize a plot, let alone come up with anything different or creative, and rendered by artists whose work is often lacking basic development in human anatomy, backgrounds or depth perception.

In order for a stripzine to interest me, it has got to offer me something unique and different—something to make it worth the extra cost and aggravation of wading through it. At a *bare minimum* the product is going to have to equal or achieve the same entertainment level as the material offered in the professional comics. Preferably the amateur stripzine should offer something different and distinctive, something *more* than can be found in professional comics. Now that can be a unique and interesting art format, or it can be a completely original story style, or it can even be a traditional hero story told with superlative plot development that transcends professional standards. But it needs something: an edge, a different perspective . . .*something* to make it more than a hack imitation of the comics clogging the racks at the local 7-11 store. Unfortunately in most cases *none* of these criteria are being met by the amateurs. They are simply poorly drawn, poorly written hack imitations of the professional comics.

Which brings us around to *Cole Black* #1. The producer of this strip, Rocky Hartberg, had an interesting idea for the format. The book is 10¾ long and only 4¼" tall, so it feels and is set up like a collection of daily comic strips. Unfortunately after this one innovation the rest is a long downhill ride.

In his introduction Hartberg claims that *Cole Black* was almost accepted by *Epic*, but the change in editors put an end to this dream. I find it absolutely incredible that anyone, even Rick Marschall, would have bought a product as poorly drawn and as ineptly plotted as *Cole Black*. If these statements can be believed, then fans owe Jim Shooter a vote of thanks for taking Marschall off that project before more damage of the same type was done.

What we have here is a sort of detective story, with science fiction and hero twists thrown in. The plot is laid in the year 1943, and the hero, Cole Black, is a Ruff and Tuff Private Detective, on the trail of Something Big, namely, a plot by the inevitable evil genius (named Moorlock) to overthrow the government of the United States (ammended midway through the story to include the rest of the world as well).

The story itself has all the faults of classic Greek drama, and none of its benefits. Classic Greek drama was generally set

against the backdrop of the god-myths. The viewer was assumed to be thoroughly familiar with the basic story line, and the play offered no background, concentrating entirely on the ultimate climax of the action and the interplay of the main characters. This was supposed to allow the writer room to explore the characters' emotional and personality development in depth without being bothered by the problems of developing plots.

Cole Black also concentrates on the climax. In this case, *all* the background events leading up to the discovery of the Arch Villain and the Big Showdown have been eliminated. The reader is apparently suposed to pick all this up from the few vague references offered in the narrative flow. However, in this case, both the story and the climax are so dull and predictable that anyone who had read comics for five or six months could fill in all the gaps by himself anyway. It's the old Robot Army to Destroy Democracy bit, complete with an egotistically insane villain, who in this case truns out to be (gasp!) a midget out to destroy the world because of its prejudices toward him.

Although supposedly set in 1943, the story is littered with slang and references to events of the late sixties and early seventies. This is the sort of sloppy writing one expects from a crudzine like this. About the only obvious anachronism the writer hasn't dropped in are TV antennas on the rooftops.

The plot is filled with inconsistencies. In one instance, the villain decides not to kill Black, who poses a dire threat to his plans. Nine panels later he decides Black must die, because he poses a dire threat to his plans.... Black, as a detective, is of course doing his job, and the villain, as the evil monster in the plot, is doing his job. Everybody else runs around doing things for no conceivable motivation and with no conveivable end goal.

The artwork for the story is also pretty awful. The robot army, for example, are all drawn to look like Iron Man, the Marvel hero. Hartburg has no real grasp of human anatomy, and he fills out his sketchy outlines with scratchy fine lines at odd places in an attempt to make his primitive, two-dimensional figures look rounded. He does not succeed. The backgrounds are as superficial as his figures. In a panel of two houses show a flair for short range perspective, but this talent is drowned in the flow of his inability to handle any other artistic task.

It took a great deal of will power on my part to actually finish this thing instead of tossing it into the trashcan after page five. Call me eccentric or whatever, but I like comics where the stories make sense and the art is both clear and easily understandable. *Cole Black* offers none of those features. I did manage to read it all the way through to the end. If you're smart, you won't bother.

RATING F

BOFFO YOCKS #1

$1.00, 1502 Green Mountain Dr., Apt 299-U, Little Rock, Ark. 72211, 20 pages 8½ x 11", photo offset, no schedule listed.

This is a humor fanzine. I'd better ammend that. This is an *attempted* humor fanzine, because most of the material is just not very funny.

The producers of this thing don't even seem to try very hard. Most of the humor is sophomoric and in bad taste. A satire on "Believe it or Not" manages to raise a couple of chuckles for three pages. A piece called "How to Recognize Leprosy" is sickening and hardly humorous. A couple of fake ad satires are amusing in part, but don't sustain themselves. A comic strip called "The Crypt of Cattle" features incredibly bad artwork and no story to speak of. The art throughout is pretty awful. I believe that *anyone* could have presented better artwork than this. The only saving grace is that the issue took a mere five minutes to read from cover to cover.

Sometimes I really wonder about fans and this whole damn hobby. Mainly I wonder what sort of creative urges, what sort of twisted motivation caused someone to turn out a fanzine like *Boffo Yocks*. I find it difficult to believe that the editor or any of the contributors really seriously believed this stuff was worth the effort it took to have it printed. But they did anyway. Here it is, photo offset with a wraparound cover on slick paper even. *Boffo Yocks* has a long way to go, but with luck, after this incredibly awful issue, they can only improve in the future.

RATING F

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN

$1.00 sample copy, Owen Laurion, 6101 Central NE, Albaq., N.M. 87108, 8½ x 11", 24 pages, photo offset

TNFF is a science fiction clubzine, specifically, one produced for the membership of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, N3F for short. As such it goes automatically to members, and also to a few selected outsiders and interested onlookers. Anyone may order a sample copy to see what it's all about.

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TNFF is a friendly, unpretentious little fanzine that attempts to perform a valuable service for the N3F membership. It carries news, commentaries, information, reviews and club doings. This issue is specifically designed as a general introductory item and is being sent to a lot of non-members.

There is a short editorial, an interesting explanation of the N3F, followed by a column called "The Report Card." This is primarily a general listing of active fanzines, both science fiction and comics-oriented, with a brief description of the general slant of each publication. 125 fanzines are listed here. If you are interested in learning where more fanzines are to trade with or to sample, this listing will be extremely useful

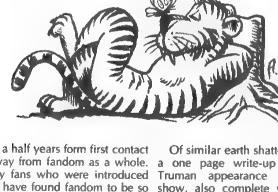
There is also an explanation of the DUFF Fund, info on apas, an intro and entry blank for the new N3F short story contest (with real cash prizes being offered), a report on last year's story contest, an explanation of the Fanzine Achievement Awards, fanzine reviews, and an explanation of the New Fanzine Appreciation Society, whereby members get fanzines absolutely free so long as they pledge to write letters of comment to each editor. There is also an application blank for the N3F.

The whole package is filled with information and background for people who may not have had much contact or experience with science fiction fandom. If you are interested in science fiction or fantasy, and would like to become an active fan, then N3F is certainly the right way to start. A membership will cost you $6.00 and will get you a great number of benefits and publications in return. The N3F has activities and outlets catering to an extremely wide variety of fan interests. You should be able to find five or six activities that grab your attention immediately.

One of the primary advantages in joining a club like the N3F is that they are geared to introducing interested people into the world of science fiction fandom, and they can get the individual involved at his own rate of speed. Rather than a haphazard exposure to the various levels of fannish activity which may or may not be understandable, the N3F specifically introduces members to the different enjoyable aspects of the hobby and is willing to take the time to help them explore all areas and develop their own interests.

I can think of no better recommendation than to mention a few statistics. The average "life cycle" of fans who enter the hobby, either sf fandom or comics fandom without the sort of guidance and experience the N3F can provide, is roughly two years. The "life cycle" of people who have been introduced through the N3F

Fandom Zone



runs five and a half years form first contact to drifting away from fandom as a whole. A great many fans who were introduced thru the N3F have found fandom to be so enjoyable they are still active in its many phases. I can speak from experience here, since I happen to be one such person.

If you are interested in the N3F, write to Janie Lamb, Rt 2, Box 272, Heiskell, Tenn. 37754. Enclose a stamped self addressed envelope and she'll send you a membership application. Or you can use the one in this issue of *TNFF* should you decide to sample the issue. You'll find the N3F an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

NO RATING

RERUNS #1

$2.00, TCG Publications, 506 Ocean Park Blvd #3, Santa Monica, Calif 90405, 32 pages, 8½ x 11", photo offset, bi-monthly.

This must be the month for new idea fanzines. *Reruns*, as it says right on the front cover, is a magazine devoted to television history. Obviously a considerable part of your interest or noninterest in *Reruns* will be determined by your attitude towards television and its development as an entertainment form. This first issue features several different components, some of which succeed and some of which do not.

The lead for the issue is an article by David Nielsen on everybody's favorite teenage louse, Eddie Haskell from the *Leave it to Beaver* program. The article is well written, carefully structured and provides an analysis of the very essence of the character and the way he was perceived by both the viewing audience and the characters in the program. The background research has been thorough and the style of writing is both entertaining and informative. It is an excellent piece of work in every respect.

After this the magazine limps on to other subjects, such as a one page article on a comedy series called *Off the Record* which starred Zero Mostel. If you don't happen to remember *Off the Record*, it's probably because the show only lasted two episodes. Hardly a monument in the history of television, wouldn't you say? No matter, an article and a cast listing is presented anyway.

Of similar earth shattering importance is a one page write-up on the Margaret Truman appearance on Ed Sullivan's show, also complete with cast credits.

The longest item in the issue is a feature on Steve McQueen's western series, *Wanted—Dead of Alive*. The article, which briefly details the series and its background, takes up only one and a half pages. The remaining pages are filled with brief plot synopses of each episode, followed by a list of the cast characters for each show, through all ninty-four episodes.

A half-page quiz and an editorial questionnaire, also half a page, finish up the issue.

Well, I hardly know what to say here. Frankly this is not exactly my idea of what a television history fanzine ought to be. Cast credits and brief plot summaries may be important to some people, but frankly I'd be a lot more interested in long explanatory articles such as the Neilsen article on Eddie Haskell in this issue. Apparently the editor had completely different ideas on this matter.

Another point that bothers me is the fact that *Reruns* features no interior illustrations of any kind. Even the title headings are typed. The only TV related photograph is that of Steve McQueen in his Josh Randall role, which is found on the front cover. For a magazine devoted to a visual medium such as television, this is ridiculous.

The price seems steep to me, also. Thirty pages of material set in large type with plenty of double-spacing and blank space is not exactly a bargain.

This is another case where the individual's interest in the material offered is going to have to determine his choice on whether or not to sample *Reruns*. I personally felt that the first issue, although obviously well researched and presented by people with a sincere interest in the subject matter, was not particularly successful in accomplishing their stated aims. Now, this is a *first* issue, and it may well be that with reader input the tone and direction of future issues may change. I hope so, because this issue, for me at least, was pretty dull once I got beyond the Eddie Haskell article.

NO RATING

SWASHBUCKLERS

$1.75, Vista Graphic Pub., 5501 Lousiana, St. Louis, Mo. 63111, stripzine, 8½ x 11", 60 pages, photo offset, no publishing schedule listed.

As I said, there's a veritable flood of these things. *Swashbucklers* is yet another amateur stripzine. This one at least offers a presentable package. For your $1.75 you get a wraparound cover on coated card stock, and 58 inside pages on sixty pound white paper. Not bad.

The stories inside are varied, to say the least. Unlike the artists in most other amateur stripzines, these artists seem to be familiar with the fundamentals of drawing and comics production.

The issue is the work of five separate artists. Perhaps it would be best to talk about the efforts of each individual separately. The lead story is written and drawn by Don Secrease and deals with the Starr family, a medieval warrior dynasty in a remote mythical kingdom. At the wedding feast of the king's son, the black sheep of the family, Josiah, a pirate, scales the castle walls, fights his way inside, and leaves a present and a note. Then he leaves.

There is a lot of fighting and action and damn little story content. This is the sort of incident that would be accptable if the readers were already thoroughly familiar with the cast of characters. Since this is the first time we have ever encountered the Starr family, this incident seems completely out of place. It also seems pretty dull and pointless.

Artwise, the story has its moments. However it seems to me that Secrease needs practice. He handles human figures well, at least in medium and close shots. His backgrounds however, are weak, scratchy and erratic. His failure in this story to make use of panel walls or other dividers to separate scenes creates a confused and jumbled appearance. His panels in many places are too cluttered to give the strip a comfortable feeling, and the definite flow of story panels one expects from a strip is missing, probably because there really isn't much of a story to flow, anyway.

Secrease also gives us a traditional style comic heroine. As part of a husband and wife spy team, Velencia Kirk seeks a new life for herself when her husband is murdered by a criminal organization. As the Colt she works for the law, but outside its restrictions.

In this instance, the very problems which worked against Secrease in the Starr story work to his advantage with Colt. Most readers are already familiar with the concept of the costumed heroine, even if they may not be familiar with Colt herself. In this adventure, we are faced with a straight crime puzzle, and the puz-

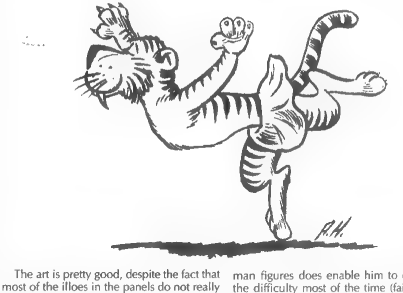
zle is solved very effectively, in four short pages. The story holds together and holds reader interest despite its brevity. In a second Colt story, she is faced with a suitably bizarre comic book-style villain, and again solves the problem in a few pages, but this time the story seems somewhat sketchy.

Secrease's talents with human faces and human anatomy come to the forefront in these two stories. He still needs work in handling his backgrounds effectively, but in these two stories he does make use of panel walls and other scene dividers, and the story flow is much more effective for it. Secrease also needs a little practice to plane out his rough spots, but these two stories do make use of panel walls and other scene dividers, and the story flow is much more effective for it. Secrease also needs a little practice to plane out his rough spots, but these two episodes show he is well on his way to success.

"Journey to Avalon" is a story written and drawn by Paul M. Cordell, and is marked by tedious writing and experimental art. A modern man is thrust back in time (whether physically or just mentally is never explained fully), into the last days of King Arthur. The bulk of the story deals with a conversation between Arthur and Merlin as they cry in their beer and pass the sour grapes back and forth about the impending doom overtaking the kingdom. We are told this adventure will be continued in future issues. If so I certainly hope we get a new writer—someone who knows how to tell a *story*, because there's not much here to hold reader interest outside of the art. This story starts nowhere, goes nowhere, and takes nine pages doing it.

The art itself is interesting. Cordell works with pattern board and uses a little zipatone to round out his work. He has created some unique visual images and has a particularly good grasp of perspective and background development. His scenes of brooding castle walls and long darkened hallways are especially effective. He seems to have an ability to handle human faces and form, but he is unable to fully master his control of the pattern board to gain maximum effectiveness on them. Still, the art is good, offering a style completely unlike the commercial comic art you usually encounter. I only wish he had a story worthy of his artistic abilities.

The artwork on the following story, contributed by Richard Page, is also very strong. However, the story is even weaker than in the Cordell piece. There isn't even a courtesy attempt at making a coherent sequence out of this jumble. A man falls into some sort of nether region, and some sort of mystic entity gives him what appears to be a magic sword. After hacking away at a sort of human army, he apparently wins, and then sits down to think about the world. The End. If you can make any sense out of it you're doing better than I can.



The art is pretty good, despite the fact that most of the illoes in the panels do not really match the narrative wording Page puts to them. He makes ingenious use of zipatone patterns to create very strong emotional effects. He is best with realistic figures and simple realistic backgrounds. He flounders when he tries to depict the mystical netherworld that spawned the magic sword. It would be interesting to see how effective Page could be on a story that actually made some kind of logical sense.

The most enjoyable part of the issue for me was Paul Daly's sword-and-spaceship adventure, featuring two rascals named Tarr and Fether, who do things for money and excitement, and occasionally work for the Satanic Empire. This time they don't, having accepted a contract to rescue a girl on a backward planet who is about to be burned at the stake as a witch because she displayed psionic powers.

The story is fast moving and well written. The protagonists and most of the supporting cast are relatively well developed, especially by the use of snappy and effective dialogue. There is a minimum of encumbering explanative narration, and the whole plot is the better for it. An adventure which could have disintegrated into routine hackwork is turned into a good, fast moving thriller by the injection of random plot twists. The rapid flow of the story falls down only when Daly pauses for the sword and fist fights. There is simply too much to these action sequences. A few panels would have been sufficient to fill the reader in on the dangers and excitement, but Daly stretches these battles out over a page or two each.

On the art side, Daly has a strong grasp of human figures, and an ability to make his foreground figures do the work of the entire panel. His backgrounds are sparce, and although they are tightly drawn, there are really too few of them. Some panels have no backgrounds at all. Even a few firm lines would have helped. Careful use of the human figures does enable him to overcome the difficulty most of the time (failing most often, again, with the prolonged action sequences). Daly has the ability to keep the reader attention focused on the events of the story, and to keep that story pace moving. This is a very refreshing change from the handling most fan artists put into their work. An artist who knows how to effectively tell his story is well ahead of his competition, and Daly seems to have this talent down pat

A final story about Enigma, a secret spy costumed hero, is contributed by Rick Burchett, who acts as inker for most of the art in this issue. Unfortunately, the episode is completely predictable and is marred by the hero performing actions which have no adequate explanation. The art is good enough, but I just couldn't get excited about it. Burchett has a good ability to handle backgrounds, but his human figures seem weak, wooden, and stilted. I dunno, I just couldn't get into this one at all.

This is a pretty large first issue for a fanzine. The art throughout has its rough points, but generally these are artists who are far superior in style and ability to the average run of fan illustrators. With a little work in a few areas many of them might be able to make the jump to pro status.

The major problem with the issue is that the stories for the most part are terrible. These people may be presentable artists, but very few of them seem able to handle the writing end of their work. There are several enjoyable stories, but not enough to make this a really satisfying issue by any means. It might be well if the artists involved in this project picked up the talents of a writer or two and confined their attention to the art chores. Despite all this, I found the issue very interesting. Had the stories been stronger I would have been happy to give this a higher recommendation, but as it stands I can comfortably give it a

RATING B–

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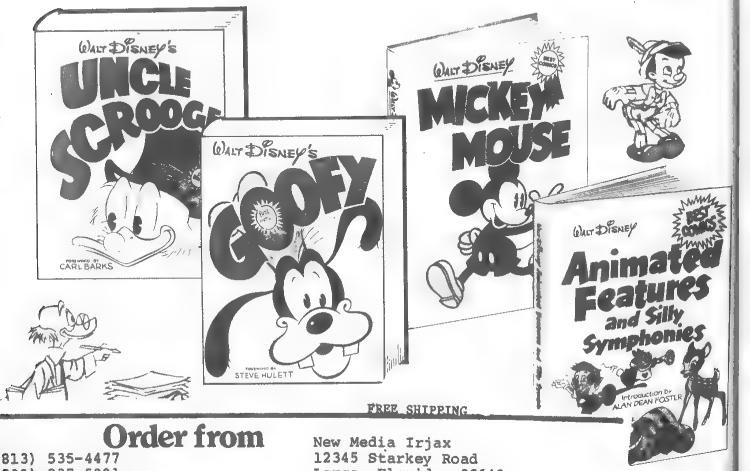

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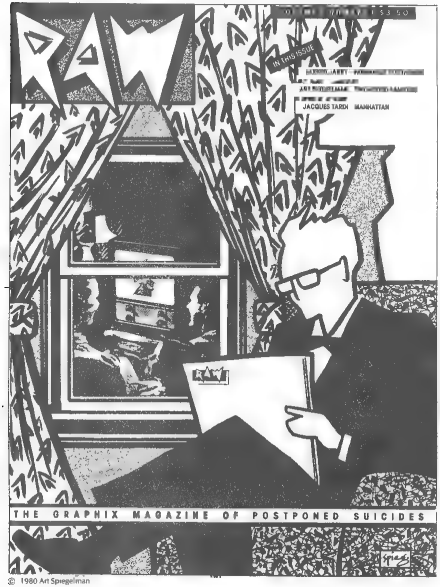
Comics Feature Preview:

RAW MAGAZINE

An interview with ART SPIEGELMAN and FRANCOISE MOULY



© 1980 Art Spiegelman

Art Spiegelman has long been in the vanguard of the comics medium. He was among the first wave of underground cartoonists in the 1960s. His and Bill Griffith's Arcade *again broke new ground during its too brief run in the mid-1970s. His collection,* Breakdowns, *released last year, once more found Spiegelman exploring and expanding the horizons of the medium. He has produced postcards, bubble gum cards, book covers for European publishers, and currently teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York, in a department that also includes Harvey Kurtzman and Will Eisner.*

It is now 1980 and Spiegelman and his co-editor, Francoise Mouly, have produced the first issue of another new magazine, Raw. *It is related to the underground movement only in that it explores new territory. Its contributors range from Barcelona cartoonist Mariscal (with three short entries), to Allentown, Pa. artist Mark Bever ("Dead Things"), to Spiegelman himself (a full color 12-page insert and a one-pager entitled "Drawn Over Two Weeks While on the Phone").*

Raw is a large, over-sized magazine, measuring 10½" x14½" and is being printed on a high quality 70lb. paper stock. Sub-titled "The Graphix Magazine of Postponed Suicides," Raw is 36 pages plus the 12 page, 5" x 7" insert.

The following interview was conducted in late May as Spiegelman and Mouly were in the middle of three weeks' work hand separating the color insert.

Drew Mullaney

FEATURE: What are your goals with *Raw* and how do they differ from the goals of *Arcade*?

SPIEGELMAN: I think *Arcade*, at the time that it came out, was a very advanced comics magazine. It was appropriate to its time and the geographical place, which was San Francisco, and the people who were surrounding me, who were the San Francisco underground cartoonists. Bill Griffith and I wanted to put together the best material from that group of people. But now it's six or so years later and I found a certain degree of impatience on my part with underground comics. I still scan the racks, but being 3,000 miles away, it has less immediacy for me than it did when I was out there. In San Francisco you can go into a small corner store and some of them actually have little racks with underground comics in them. Here, they don't have that kind of high profile. That in and of itself makes it seem less tangible to me and, I suppose, to other people who are geographically far away from that scene.

Also, I think there's been a tendency in underground comics for several unfortunate things to happen: one is it's not a place for new blood. The people who broke turf in 1967, '68, '69, myself included, are still appearing in underground comics. But when we were doing it, it wasn't that our work was over the top in terms of quality, it's just that we were at the right place at the right time. Now it's much harder for new talent to break into underground comics. That to me is a sign of ossification. It's not a vital scene anymore. Some of the cartoonists are still doing wonderful work, but some of them have fallen into riffs where essentially they do variations on exactly what they were doing ten years ago, with fine tuning that has been developed over the years. But that's it. The themes have tended to calcify, also. There's still the preoccupation with sex, violence and drugs. The Furry Freak Bros. are certainly as popular as ever, and that's still what people associate with underground comics. So it made a certain leap, but it stopped.

MOULY: The publishers are aware of it because they only publish certain kinds of work and certain artists.

SPIEGELMAN: Yes. They're more prone to publish the old artists or certainly the old titles. Turner would rather do *Slow Death* #7 or 8 than Whatever #1.

FEATURE: Do you think the publishers are responsible for things becoming stale?

SPIEGELMAN: They're responsible, but I wouldn't hold them culpable because it's really the audience's fault. The publisher is only responding to the marketplace and that's what people have come to expect from underground comics. One of the things even with *Arcade* that was really hard to break out of was that people expected sex, drugs and violence. Hardly any of those things were covered.

FEATURE: Was the reason for doing *Arcade* in a larger format an attempt to differentiate its appearance from underground comics?

SPIEGELMAN: There were several reasons. One of them was because at the time underground comics were going through a recessionary cycle, and we just wanted to have a life raft that everybody could climb on to. Another reason was that *Comix Book* was coming out and we wanted to respond to it. *Comix Book* was this compromised underground comics magazine coming out from Marvel, and I was even to some degree associated with it. But it wasn't satisfactory. It didn't do the job and we wanted to do it up right.

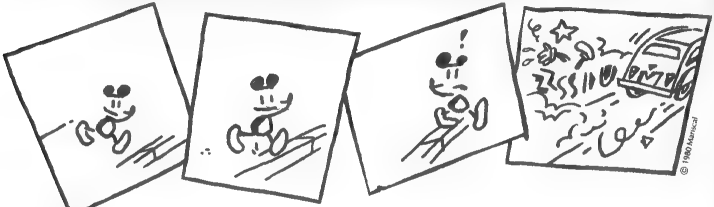
FEATURE: What was your initial involvement with *Comix Book*?

SPIEGELMAN: Originally I was going to do a cover and several interior pages, but when I found out what the copyright situation was, I allowed them to reprint my work, but I couldn't do new work. One of the major inroads that underground comics made was the possibility for artists to have the right to own their material and do whatever they saw fit with it. I think the battle fought then allowed magazines like *Heavy Metal* and *Epic* to consider similar arrangements.

The results satisfied me at the time but since then I've wanted to see a place where new people can work. François and I want to see a place for new themes to develop, new possibilities for what comics can deal with. It's funny because things are now going full circle: underground comics were responsible for a certain kind of comic happening in France, the Netherlands, Spain and other countries. They took the lead from underground comics, which then indicated that comics could be done for adults. They could be a lot freer. It was permuted in France, for instance, to something exciting in its own right. Now it's our turn to accept that there's something happening over there. Let's bring it over here again and take it one *more* step.

We'd like to present the kind of possiblities that the European audience has and made possible, and make that available here.

A taste of the wonderful cartoons of Barcelona artist Mariscal, from a one-pager entitled "Fermin, Lucas & Piker."



In *Raw*, 25-30% of the material is European art. Another percentage of the magazine is work by new cartoonists, people who have been active in animated cartooning, the world of so-called "high art"—painting and performance art—and illustrators doing comics. These are other inputs. We'll be using underground cartoonists and even overground cartoonists, if we find work that fits the sensibility of the magazine.

FEATURE: I notice that the first issue you're not using any of the well-known underground cartoonists. Is this because you don't want to be typed as an underground comic?

SPIEGELMAN: There's two reasons: one is that I'm 3,000 miles away and while I keep in fairly close contact with a handful of my cronies, it was a little hard to explain what we wanted the magazine to be. We had a vision of what this would be as an entity as well as what the specific strips could be. Rather than try to do that, it was easier to just put it together and show people what we want to do. There've been commitments on the part of underground cartoonists who want to do work for it, and we'll have their work in future issues. Kim Deitch will be doing something with us, Bill Griffith . . .I'm hoping that Justin Green will do something with us, as well. I don't think we'll use everybody from *Arcade* in any given issue, but some of that stuff will filter in because those are the exciting artists who are working in America right now. The main thing with the first issue was to set a tone. We thought that was an easier way to set a tone. We didn't want to build up an expectation for an *Arcade* that happened to have three more inches in height and two more inches in width. I guess our distance from San Francisco is an asset because we wanted to do something that *wasn't* underground comics. This could have turned out to be just a big underground comics book and that's not as exciting as *Raw*.

MOULY: At the beginning we were just trying to explain to people what we were trying to do. Then we gave up. We started looking at work from different people. Most of the work we looked at was European work because we could reprint it. A few people looked at what we were selecting and we looked at their portfolios—the people who were in New York. I'm sure that if any of the [San Francisco cartoonists] had been around . . .

SPIEGELMAN: Yeah. Gary Halgren, for example, is now living in New York and did some illos in *Raw* and also wants to do strips with us. It was very difficult to communicate the specific kinds of things we wanted to see. One of the reasons there's so many relatively short pieces in the first issue is not because we have a commitment to things that are one or two pages long rather than ten page comics stories, but just because we wanted to give more of a spectrum in one issue.

FEATURE: So whereas the undergrounds fit their time, *Raw* is the direction you think comics should get into now?

SPIEGELMAN: It's a direction for *Raw* to go into. When I say this about underground comics, that's in general. There are specific books which have specific pieces that I like very much. It's just that we wanted to see a new context for the material. And that's *Raw*. I think that it exudes a certain kind of class and elegance. I think it's an interesting tension because comics, in America at least, are considered this real gutter medium. To have that tension between an elegant format and a medium we're used to thinking of as junk literature makes you look at the work in a different way. The risk it runs is seeming pretentious. The risk is worth it because it asks for an involvement on the part of an audience that's much more intense than the audience is used to giving a comic. That makes a different kind of work happen. It's one possibility of what we want to see happen to comics in the future, and we certainly want to explore it.

FEATURE: Do you think it's an important part of comics that rather than be cheap entertainment, it be something the audience can really get into and think about?

MOULY: I don't think it should be just one way or the other. What we're trying to present is an alternative. If somebody wants to do comics that are like the ongoing daily strips to keep people entertained, that's one attitude and it's certainly never going to be cancelled by *Raw*. It might die of its own or have a rebirth, but if somebody is interested in comics as a medium, which is pictures and words together but is not necessarily adventure or humor, *Raw* is one place in America which can print that work.

SPIEGELMAN: "Comics" is a word that sometimes gives people problems. As a medium it's as flexible and has as much potential as, say film. It's *not* cheap film; it's something else. But it has as much potential as a medium so that to say "Well, should film be the kind of film that Jean-Luc Godard makes or should it be the kind of film that Howard Hawks makes?" . . .It's just a medium and what that vessel if filled with is dependent on the artist's interests and needs, as well as the audience's.

MOULY: We're more aware of artists' needs for this magazine than an audience's need for it, but that may be because we are in contact with the artists, and the audience is not aware that it exists yet.

We've been talking to a number of people who have been involved with redefining comics just by trying to find another name for it. That means that those people and a number of others—people we've met and people we've seen work from—are disturbed by the ghetto. They're interested in doing something, but cannot relate to the current work they see. In a sense, one of the rewards of doing *Raw* was meeting artists who are used to working on paintings for gallery shows and so on. Usual-

"This could have turned out to be just a big underground comic book, and that's not as exciting as *Raw*."

"*Raw* is an attempt at redefining what a comic can be."

ly if you ask these people to do comics, they'll do a little doodly thing, a little story with a gag as a punch line. But in *Raw* we had a number of people who are gallery artists, filmmakers and so on, who did things which combined word and picture. They weren't necessarily funny and they weren't a parody of comics. They were thoroughly involved with words and pictures and what that meant for them. That is what we're really interested in seeing.

FEATURE: In other words, you'd like to introduce to the comics medium artists who work in other media and see what their perspective can bring to comics?

SPIEGELMAN: Yeah. This is a magazine of words and pictures. It's a literary magazine. It uses comics instead of seas of type as its way of communicating. Any artist who's capable of expressing himself would have a vehicle in which to travel and present that work.

There are things that are just graphics in here, there are things that are just text pieces. *Raw* is an attempt at redefining what a comic can be. It's not by doing polemical essays; it's just by presenting the kind of work we'd like to see. It's one of the reasons I got into doing the kind of comics I do: I wanted to read that kind of comic and nobody was making it for me.

It's also a place where we want to reprint some early material that should be resuscitated. I found that in teaching at the School of Visual Arts, the only comics the students are aware of are the Marvel comics, so they don't even have an option. Marvel comics are pretty feeble if you compare them to, let's say, the EC comics of the 1950s. And going back further than that, the great comics of the 1920s and 1930s. And beyond that, how about going back before 1900? There were wonderful things that happened that were basically comics.

MOULY: We're not trying to say "Now we're going to show everything that can be comics." We're just interested in saying "Don't follow the usual rules, but play around, experiment and stretch things out." When you go back, even before newspaper comics, there were a number of people who were experimenting with the idea of combining words and pictures. At the time they didn't have anybody to follow, so each one of them created his own world and his own rules.

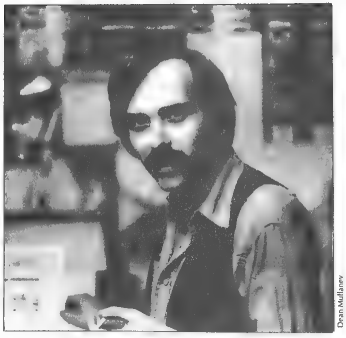
SPIEGELMAN: Did you know that Gustave Doré started out by being essentially a comic book artist? He did two or three books that are picture stories: ten little pictures on a page, and I think there's even balloons in some of them. There's text underneath the pictures and it flows from unit of time to unit of time.

MOULY: The main thing that makes this interesting is that rather than just doing illustrated stories, Doré had graphic ideas which were wonderful. For example, he did a scene that repeats: there's an army coming in and the first scene is a detailed drawing; in the second one it becomes more simplified; by the fifth or sixth time the army comes in, it's just little sticks, a simplification of his first picture.

SPIEGELMAN: The book is called *The History of Holy Russia*. So there's all this great stuff and people should be exposed to that, as well as to contemporary work because it's really a wonderful continuum worth plugging into.

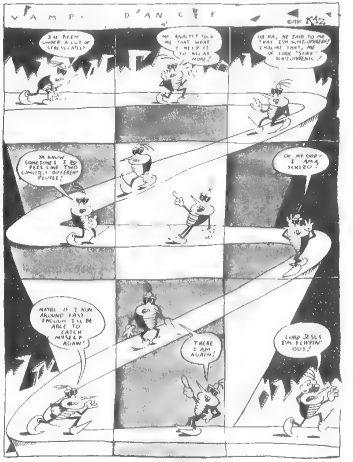
FEATURE: It seems as though you're expanding the spectrum of what has traditionally been labelled comics. Are you looking for a new audience for this magazine?

SPIEGELMAN: We'd like to reach those people within the comics community who are receptive to something other than what they're ordinarily exposed to. We'd also like to find an audience that right now when they hear the word "comics," reach for their guns: "Comics? That's junk." It's a trigger reaction; there's no intrinsic reason for it, but the history [of comics] has been such



Drain Mallarney

that junk is what one associates with comics. Those people won't even look at an underground comic unless I put it in front of their noses and say, "This is something else. It's not what you think it is." Everybody who's interested in comics has had this experience, of trying to turn somebody on to the material and saying, "No, forget about the fact that it's on newsprint and it's junky looking. Read this story." One possible way of getting around it—certainly the tactic we're trying to pull off here—is that nobody has to be ashamed to look at this magazine. That just


VAMP DANCE
I'M BEEN SHOWN A LOT OF STRANGE STUFF
WE AGREED THAT WHAT WE DO IS NOT ART
HE SAID TO ME "YOU'RE SCHIZOPHRENIC"
I'M NOT SURE WHAT I'M DOING
OH, MY GOD! I'M A SCHIZO!
MAYBE IF I'M ALONE I'LL BE ABLE TO CATCH MYSELF AGAIN!
THERE I AM AGAIN!
LOOK AT ALL THE PEOPLE OUT!

allows things to happen.

MOULY: Another thing was trying to design this as a magazine.

SPIEGELMAN: So it isn't just a large collection of comics, but the magazine has a look, feel and flavor all its own. You pointed out before that when you looked at the title logo and the cover design, it reminded you of the new music magazines, like *Wet* or *Interview*, *Slash* and magazines like that. To me that's a fine connection because those magazines are graphically a lot more stimulating than most other magazines.

MOULY: It's also a new format so that people don't have too many set expectations.

FEATURE: There's no stigma attached to it yet, since it's new.

SPIEGELMAN: Not yet. If anything, *Wet* magazine is a coffee table magazine for the new generation the way at one time, in 1971 or so, every self-respecting hippie had to have a few underground comics on his crate, along with a hash pipe and a couple of other accoutrements. We may be all wet about this [laughter] . . .we may be all *wrong* about this, but we figured that one nice thing about these new large size magazines is that there's not a glut of them. One problem we had with *Arcade* when we tried to get a distributor, was where the heck were they going to put it? They'd look at *Arcade* and say, "It's a little like *The National Lampoon*. Well, it's a little like *Creepy*? No, it's not like *Creepy*." [Laughter] They didn't know what to do with us. Besides, if they were willing to take us at all on a regular magazine stand, they'd just have to put it in with the men's magazines, or something. *Raw*, at least, will be in a context of other magazines that don't have much in common except their size. There's a handful of magazines in this format: there's one that's just devoted to architecture, there's one that's just devoted to photography, called *Picture*, there's a couple of artists' magazines, certainly a few music magazines, fashion magazines, magazines of advertising . . .

FEATURE: Do you think *Raw* will ever expand the audience into the masses?

MOULY: Getting it to the masses isn't what we're thinking about. We think that we have queer enough—strange enough—taste and we're not in touch with the masses. If we look at television or read mass market magazines, they're not things we're interested in. So we assume that people who would be interested in the same things that we are . . .

SPIEGELMAN: Or are as alienated from the mass culture as we are . . .

MOULY: . . .would be interested in *Raw*. We certainly don't expect that this magazine will ever have a mass audience.

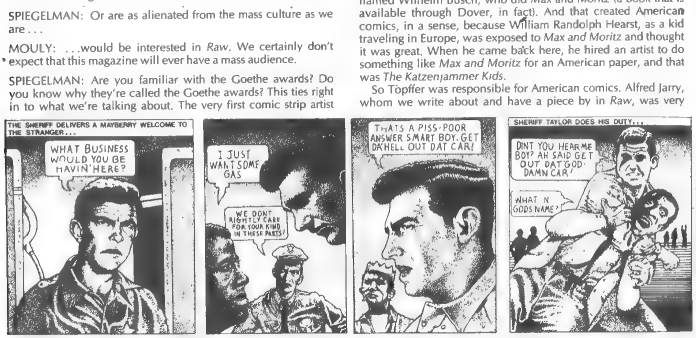
SPIEGELMAN: Are you familiar with the Goethe awards? Do you know why they're called the Goethe awards? This ties right in to what we're talking about. The very first comic strip artist

Dean Mullaney

was a guy named Rudolph Töpffer, a Swiss school teacher who for his own amusement did these picture stories, with, like, six panels on a page that for the first time told an interwoven story with closely interrelated pictures. This was about 1830. Topffer would print up thirty or forty copies of this thing on a cheap lithograph and disseminate them to his friends. One copy reached Goethe, who said "God, this is incredible stuff! What a great medium, these words and pictures together!" He passed it around to his friends, who were a lot more influential than Töpffer's friends. As a result of that, the book ended up going into other kinds of printings. It was very popular in Europe until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The stuff that Töpffer did didn't reach a mass audience, but it did reach the movers and shakers. By doing that, the next generation was affected by what he did. Even better than reaching the people who were reading the cheap novelizations that they had then, Töpffer reached other artists, reached other writers. You can trace it this way: Töpffer directly affected a German artist named Wilhelm Busch, who did *Max and Moritz* (a book that is available through Dover, in fact). And that created American comics, in a sense, because William Randolph Hearst, as a kid traveling in Europe, was exposed to *Max and Moritz* and thought it was great. When he came back here, he hired an artist to do something like *Max and Moritz* for an American paper, and that was *The Katzenjammer Kids*.

So Töpffer was responsible for American comics. Alfred Jarry, whom we write about and have a piece by in *Raw*, was very


THE SHERIFF DELIVERS A MAYBERRY WELCOME TO THE STRANGER...
WHAT BUSINESS WOULD YOU BE TAKIN' HERE?
I JUST WANT SOME GAS
WE DON'T RIGHTLY CARE FOR YOUR KIND IN THESE PARTS!
THAT'S A PISS-POOR ANSWER SMART BOY. GET OA HELL OUT DAT CAR!
SHERIFF TAYLOR DOES HIS DUTY...
DINT YOU HEAR ME BOY? AH SAID GET OUT DAT GOD-DAMN CAR!
WHAT N GODS NAME?
© 1980 Josh Alan Friedman & Drew Friedman

A four-panel sequence from Josh Alan and Drew Friedman's "The Andy Griffith Show."

"We're not rejecting the comics traditions—we just want to expand on what's possible."

affected by reading Töpffer's books when he was a kid. When he was an adult, he dedicated a chapter of one of his books to Töpffer. Cocteau claims that Töpffer was a big influence on him. Doré was also very influenced by Töpffer's work. So he had a strong impact.

I don't know how things work in an electronic age, but that's the way in which we'd like to reach a mass audience. If we only had 5,000 readers but they're the right 5,000, that's great.

FEATURE: You think, then, that *Raw*'s influence will be on other artists?

SPIEGELMAN: Other artists, other art directors, other writers, other people involved in media An important part of the equation that's usually left out is that the audience is as important as the artist. The audience determines what's possible, and right now the audience expects and receives this stuff that you're supposed to lean back and let hit you for a second, and then go away somewhere else. Nothing is asked of you as an audience; you're not asked to participate in a piece of work and give it your attention, give it your energy and thereby reap a far richer reward than you would from the kind of material that doesn't require any effort. Hopefully, we'll find that kind of an audience. We'd like to do real art that has an audience. That's why we're so betwixt and between: one of the things that attracts me to comics is that there is some life there; I find very little life when I wander into the Soho galleries—it just leaves me blank. We want to do art *with* an audience.

MOULY: Which doesn't mean that the artist has to play up to the audience. It just means that we have to find an audience which will respond to what the artist is doing.

SPIEGELMAN: The impetus comes from the artist, but obviously if there's no audience, *Raw* magazine will come out two or three times and wave bye-bye. We assume, and hope, that there are other people like us.

MOULY: If we get letters saying "Well, this shouldn't have been like this," we're not going to chastise our artists.

FEATURE: In other words, you won't sell out.

SPIEGELMAN: There's nothing to sell out. There's so little money involved here (laughter).

IT WAS THE GUY NEXT TO ME, HE WAS STIRRIN' HIS COFFEE LONGER THAN NECCESSARY.
HERE'S Y'BURGER,
HEY, IT'S GOT A BITE OUT OF IT
A BUM STUMBLED IN. MAYBE I DIED LAST NIGHT AND WENT TO HELL.
OKAY, SO I'LL KNOCK A DIME OFF

An excerpt from "Canal Street" by Gerry Capelle, a contributor

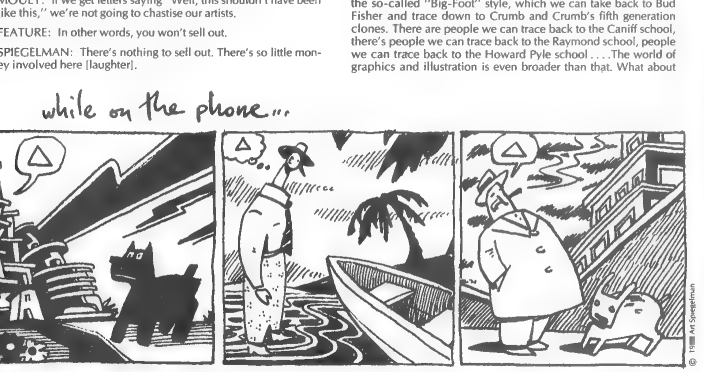
FEATURE: You mentioned before about looking for material which fits in with the sensibility of *Raw*. What exactly do you mean by that?

MOULY: It's very hard for us to define what we're doing because it's much more a matter of taste, rather than a commercial approach or an intellectual approach. It's just things that Art and I have been looking at that we want to pass along.

SPIEGELMAN: We have certain antipathies. We don't have a predisposition towards science fiction and fantasy, possibly because that's where most of the action has been in the recent past. Anyone who's wanted to do so-called "adult comics" has been moving in the direction of the kind of things you might find in *Heavy Metal* or *Epic*. What that does is keep all the baggage that you associate with children's comics and move it into adolescence. We're interested in going even further than that. I doubt if a superhero will find his way into our magazine. There are places for that to appear; there's no place for our kind of stuff to appear.

FEATURE: Would you say you're shooting more for literary material?

SPIEGELMAN: And graphically exciting material—things with real content and things with a strong visual approach. Most comics material feeds in from relatively few stylistic sources. There's the so-called "Big-Foot" style, which we can take back to Bud Fisher and trace down to Crumb and Crumb's fifth generation clones. There are people we can trace back to the Caniff school, there's people we can trace back to the Raymond school, people we can trace back to the Howard Pyle school . . . .The world of graphics and illustration is even broader than that. What about



LOOKIN' AT THE BUM MADE ME SICK, BUT I'D ALREADY ORDERED SCRAMBLED EGGS, SO I COULDN'T LEAVE.
I DON'T WANT A DUNE OFF, I WANT ANOTHER BURGER!

to Lampoon and Heavy Metal.

Tout ça pour vous dire qu'il était normal que l'ait eu tendance à traîner à nouveau mes pas dans Manhattan...
PIED LEFT TURN
© 1980 Jacques Tardi

A panel from "Manhattan" by Paris artist Jacques Tardi before translation. Tardi's use of redrawn photographs in the background offers a weight and contrast to some of the lighter entries in the magazine

tracing comics back to Dada artists, German expressionists, Constructivists? One thing we found out that is exciting: the Constructivist painters right after the Russian Revolution, like Mayakovsky and Lissitsky, had this great opportunity. They became artists of the Revolution. They wanted to revolutionize what art was. They didn't only do easel painting;they designed buildings, match book covers, film posters, cups, plates. They were trying to bring high art principles to the masses. It didn't work, but they tried. It lasted until Stalin said "Get these clowns out of here and let's get something that looks like Corben drew it?" [Laughter] One of the things Lissitsky and a few other people did that was so terrific was that they would do a daily comic strip. They took over the newspaper building. It was this big building with windows all across the front. Every morning they had these giant panels which they hand painted, that would be put one panel in each window and would relate the news. That would be the comic strip of the day. The one or two people in the crowd who were literate would read it to the rest of the people. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Much more interesting than the Times Square lit-up news bulletin.

MOULY: And that's our next magazine! [Laughter]

SPIEGELMAN: [Laughter] That may be a tangental thought, but what I'm saying is that there are other traditions on which to draw, as well as the comics traditions. We're not rejecting the comics traditions; we just want to expand on what's possible

FEATURE: You showed me the color insert you're working on for the first issue. Will there be inserts in future issues?

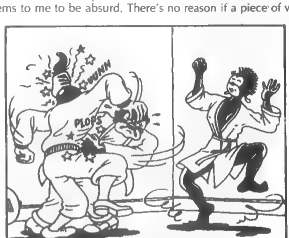
SPIEGELMAN: I always liked Crackerjacks when I was a kid [laughter]. Every issue will have a crackerjack in it. The first issue will have the twelve page full color, 5"×7" comic book stapled into the center that I'm drawing. In future issues we'll have color comic booklets by other artists, we'll have paper dolls, we'll have bubble gum cards one issue, hopefully . . .whatever we can work out that's intriguing.

FEATURE: The hand-separated color insert plays around with color, a process of the medium which is not usually explored in stories. What are your thoughts about the relationship between art and printing?

SPIEGELMAN: One of the things that is wonderful about comics is that comics are a printed medium. What that means is that there's no original. I like that fact. As I've been doing this strip, I've shown my work to my friends. It's a real problem because if I show them the original black-and-white drawings, I'll say "Well, that's not it. Try to imagine this with red over here, and then there's this blue streak . . ." and nobody's going to be able to follow my thoughts. The next stage is my color sketched-in thing and even that isn't it, because there are things that can only happen in printing. That's exciting to me, the fact that the printed version is the real object. Art to me isn't necessarily an oil painting just because an oil painting is done by hand and is precious. It's precious because of the thought and the energy of the artist which happens to manifest itself on an easel. What's great about comics is that the thought manifests itself on the printed page, which leaves it affordable. You don't have to be a millionaire to buy a comic book. If it's good enough, it's as good as any painting. It's just different.

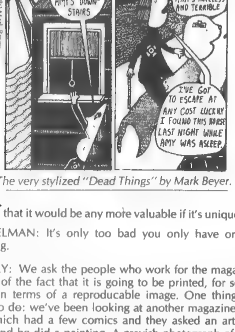
MOULY: That's a problem with fine art: it is made in limited editions of one or prints in limited numbers. This limitation seems to me to be absurd. There's no reason if a piece of work

I'LL PLAY THE BLUES FOR YOU



ALL YOUR LONELINESS I GOTTA SOOTHE

"Francoise and I want to see a place for new themes to develop."


SOON
I'LL JUST QUIETLY SLIP OUT OF THE HOUSE WHILE APE'S DOWN STAIRS
I'VE GOTTEN INVOLVED IN A SITUATION THAT'S HOPELESS AND TERRIBLE
I'VE GOT TO ESCAPE AT ANY COST. LUCKILY I FOUND THIS HOUSE LAST NIGHT WHILE APE WAS ASLEEP
©1980 Mark Beyer

The very stylized "Dead Things" by Mark Beyer.

is good that it would be any more valuable if it's unique.

SPIEGELMAN: It's only too bad you only have one original painting.

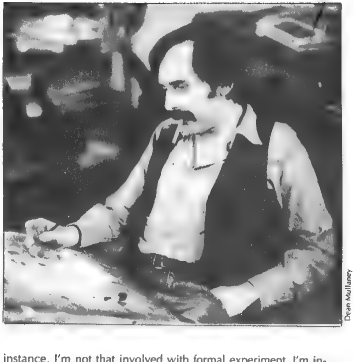
MOULY: We ask the people who work for the magazine to be aware of the fact that it is going to be printed, for someone to think in terms of a reproducable image. One thing we don't want to do: we've been looking at another magazine that came out which had a few comics and they asked an artist to do a page and he did a painting. A grayish photograph of that painting was printed in the magazine. We're not going to print grayish photographs of a painting as an artist's contribution to the magazine. That's just absurd.

FEATURE: Do you feel that artists working in comics should be aware of the technical aspects of comics printing, color separation, etc.? For example, you're doing hand color separations for the insert in *Raw*. Is that an important part of being an artist in a medium which is printed?

SPIEGELMAN: I think that a rudimentary understanding is essential. Otherwise it just doesn't look good when it's printed. Beyond that, it depends on the artist's interests. I certainly wouldn't want to say that every artist should have my specific set of interests in the printing process...The fact that I have that set of interests affects my work in a certain way.

FEATURE: Do you feel that knowledge allows you to go further than an artist who doesn't necessarily have that interest?

SPIEGELMAN: It lets me do stuff that's different. I couldn't be doing the kind of work I'm doing if I didn't understand the process. I'd be doing something else. Printing is one of my interests. Another interest is the phenomenon of looking at a page and how you read. You tend to read left to right. Sometimes I'm interested in bursting that so that you have to find your way around a page. I'm also interested in some of the more traditional aspects of comics. I am interested in storytelling. Whatever else we may say, comics seem to be a storytelling medium. It's basic to it. I'm working on a book called *Maus*, which is a two hundred fifty page comics novel about my father's and mother's experiences in Hitler's Europe. In that particular


Drawn Mail/Avery

instance, I'm not that involved with formal experiment. I'm involved in the most traditional thing. I don't want to get in the way of the story. Some stories are so important that you want to get out of their way, and let them get told as fast as they can, as clearly as they can. Most stories, however, are just an excuse to spend a few minutes with somebody doing their riff. When that's the case, my riff isn't to do the story one more time because everybody knows the stories already. What's more interesting is finding a new way of presenting it so that the story's a coat hanger on which one's ideas can be hung.

FEATURE: You draw in a few different styles. Is that, as in doing straightforward storytelling for *Maus*, your way of adjusting the art style to what you want to say in one particular story?

SPIEGELMAN: Yeah, since I don't have one way in which the drawing always comes out of my hand, I've tried to turn what could have been a liability for me—the fact that I keep drawing differently—into some kind of an asset: try to choose a way of drawing that seems appropriate to the material at hand.

An analogy, which I'm sure I've used before, is thinking of myself as an actor rather than a star. Like, Marilyn Monroe: whatever movie she was in, that's Marilyn Monroe. That's a star. And there's these people who you may not remember their names, then but they inhabit the character that they're portraying. What I want to do is put myself at the surface of whatever material I'm involved with and bring it out the best I can.

FEATURE: How long have you been working on *Raw*?

SPIEGELMAN: January is when we first decided, "To hell with it, we're going to do it ourselves. We're not going to wait for someone else to give us the magazine we want to read." [Laughter] After that there were two or three months of just muttering about what a magazine would be. And there has been about three months of actual work bringing the first issue out. What our hopes are is to come out between two and four times a year, depending upon the amount of good material we find, and on what audience interest there is.

For those interested in Raw, *copies will be available on newsstands and comic book shops, or direct from Raw Books, 27 Greene Street, New York, NY 10013 for $3.50 plus 50¢ postage*

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Essay on the Tragi-Co(s)mic

Thor 300 and X-Men 137 as high tragedy

by Peter Sanderson

If you want an example of the way true meanings of words are rendered ever more obscure these days, take a look at the use of the word "tragedy." Nowadays it seems to mean no more than "a source of sadness." Every death and every misfortune that is at all serious is described in coversation or in print as tragic. But the word "tragedy" connotes a particular kind of misfortune, indeed a kind so grievous that to term it a misfortune is to deal in gross understatement. Even death is not necessarily tragic in the truest sense of the word. The word "tragedy," after all, though it can describe real events, also describes a form of drama in which the stability of a society, the world or even the cosmos, is put at risk, and in which a heroic personnage, greater in many ways than his fellows, falls from the heights he has achieved.

Most deaths in fiction are not tragic in this sense. Gwen Stacy did not die a tragic death when the Green Goblin threw her off that bridge; she died a melodramatic one, designed merely to shock the readers and wrench a few tears from them. There was no sense of greatness lost, nor did we even learn anything more about her or Spider-Man's characters through the death. Rather, the whole scene served as a confession that the editor and writer did not know how to further Ms. Stacy's characterization and so decided to dispose of her. So many other "real" deaths in comics seem to serve just this purpose. This raises the question of whether it is possible to do truly tragic stories within mainstream superhero comics.

This reviewer might at first have said no, but this summer two superb stories have appeared to prove him wrong: *Thor* 300 and *X-Men* 137. *Thor*, in fact, has been adapting a great tragic work, Richard Wagner's four-opera cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, with some intriguing variations.

Wagner begins the *Ring* with his equivalent of the story of the Garden of Eden: Alberich sets the destructive course of events of the story into motion when forswears love in order to achieve godlike power, and steals the Rhinegold, which in the form of the Ring can make it possible to conquer the world, form the idyllic natural world of the Rhinemaidens. Shortly thereafter we met Odin (called Wotan in the *Ring*), who has founded his system of rule over the gods and the world on a series of moral compromises, notably his agree- Siegfried, Owes nothing to the morally corthe gods need for their continued survival, over to the giants Fasolt and Fafnir in payment for building the palace of Valhalla, a bargain Odin has no intention of keeping. In seeking to find an alternate means of paying the giants, Odin learns of the Ring, and steals it from Alberich through the use of Loki's (Loge in Wagner) trickery. Odin is tempted by the idea of mastering his power, but he is unwilling to pay the price of that power, the rejection of love. His moral qualms do not help him: he has set his doom into motion by stealing the Ring from the being who has given himself wholly over to the lust for power, and Alberich sets the curse upon the Ring and the gods.

Tainted by his moral compromises, Odin is unable to rid the world of the curse himself, and so he seeks a mortal hero who will redeem the world through his ability to use force to defeat evil, and apparently, through his union with a woman in a perfect love. Odin's son Siegmund, who bears a sword given him by Odin himself, is the first candidate for the role of the world's champion, but he is destroyed by the repressive laws of the status quo that Odin himself has established. Odin finds himself forced to murder Siegmund to punish him for his supposedly immoral love for Sieglinda. The Valkyrie Brunnhilda tries to play the role of redemtress and succeeds in saving Sieglinda and her unborn child Siegfried, but must pay for her own defiance of Odin's law by losing her godhood and being cast into a death-like sleep. Odin is tormented with guilt and anguish, not only over his theft of the Ring that led to the curse, but over having been forced by his own laws to do what he has to. Siegmund and Brunnhilda.

The second attempt to create a redeeming hero proves far more successful. Siegried, owes nothing to the morally corrupted Odin: he forges his own sword and uses it to smash Odin's staff of power. Siegfried reclaims the Ring by killing the evil Fafnir and achieves a transcendant love with Brunnhilda, whom he "resurrects." Siegfried too is destroyed, not by the gods but by his fellow earth-dwellers: the power-lust of Alberich's son Hagen, the amoral self-interest of Gunther and Gutruna, and the vengefulness of Brunnhilda herself, who thinks herself betrayed by her lover. Siegfried's heroism is twisted by Hagen's brainwashing potion, the love between him and Brunnhilda gives way to their forced marriages to Gutruna and Gunther and to Brunnhilda's passion for vengeance. Finally, Siegfried is ignobly killed: betrayed by his lover and stabbed in the back. Odin despairing over the total ruin of his plans, destroys himself, the gods and Valhalla in a fiery conflagration while Burnnhilda, herself torn by remorse, immolates herself in Siegfried's funeral pyre, and in so sacrificing herself in the name of love and expiation of her sin, purges the Ring of its curse. The Rhinemaidens reclaim the Ring, Hagen is killed, and the world, now free of its morally corrupted godly rule, is redeemed

Thor has recounted the events of this story, but until issue 300, failed to evoke the dramatic passions that give it its full meaning. Odin comes off as a manipulator of events, but not as a despairing, world-weary, guilt-ridden monarch and harsh but loving father. The dialogue in the comics does not emphasize the moral corruption of Odin's rule the way the opera's soliloquies do. Most strikingly of all, the *Thor* writers and artist have failed to communicate the depth and passion of the love between Siegfried and Brunnhilda. It comes off as nothing more than a story convention—the hero must have a girlfriend—and undoubtedly strikes readers who know the comics but not the operas as considerably less inter-

esting than Thor's romance with Jane Foster!

Probably to avoid violating Brunnhilda the Valkyrie's characterization in *Defenders* (which has never struck me as being that of an Asgardian warrior), Gruenwald and Macchio deleted Brunnhilda's murderous vengefulness and have her reveal Siegfried's vulnerablity offhandedly, without thinking. This removes the expiatory quality from her suicide, and, since the curse is not removed by the flames of the funeral pyre in Marvel's version, Brunnhilda's death is no longer a redemptive self-sacrifice either. Gruenwald and Macchio do show us that her suicide is a Wagnerian love-death, but considering how unaffecting that romance has been, I doubt that any of the readers are at all impressed. It is partly because the love between Siegfried and Brunnhilda is so poorly handled that issue 299, which recounts the efforts to pervert and destroy that love, comes off as so dull and convoluted. Brunnhilda's and Siegfried's deaths bear little emotional or thematic reassonance as handled in Marvel's adaptation, and since Brunnhilda's death resolves nothing in this version, readers may be forgiven for wondering what the heck this Ring story was doing here interrupting the Celestials story. So the Oversword is made out of the Rhinegold. Did we need five issues to establish that?

The rest of *Thor* 300 after Brunnhilda's (temporary) death makes up for all that has gone wrong before. It is not Brunnhilda who is ultimately the hero of the very fact that she is human. The key wagner, but Odin, whom Wagner places offstage for the entire course of the final opera of the cycle. Like Wagner's, Gruenwald and Macchio's Odin is a god who has seen all his best laid plans utterly collapse. Odin's opening soliloquy in *Thor* 300 reminds us that he holds himself responsible for all that has gone wrong because he coveted the power of the ring so long ago. But while Wagner's Odin commits suicide in despair over his powerlessness to alter events for the better, Gruenwald and Macchio's acts very differently. Their Odin has seen his pawns fail to accomplish his goal, and has realized as a result that his efforts to evade responsibility for his sins are in vain. He was already a tragic figure in Wagner in the true sense of the term: a being of godlike power, literally in this case, who overreached himself (by stealing the Ring), and was forced by events he could not control but which he had set into motion into recognizing his limitations and failing, and finally is deprived of both his power and his life. Gruenwald and Macchios Odin is, however, more of a tragic *hero* than Wagner's, for their Odin makes himself into a classical scapegoat figure. He takes the burden of the evils of Alberich's curse upon himself, and crucifies himself, believing his sins have made him unfit to be ruler of the gods, and hoping by his death to expiate the curse, thereby freeing the world of much evil and making room for a new, better ruler to take his place. He has made the sacrifice to the gods who stand above even him, to save those who are lesser than himself. The crucifixion imagery is hardly accidental. (Note too that Jean Grey is placed in a crucifixion position in the original "psychic lobotomy" ending of the Dark Phoenix story. What makes Odin more heroic than she in this ending is that she did not will her own suffering, but is simply a victim of others.)

Rather than passively retreating from the action after his defeat by Siegfried as he does in Wagner, Odin in this version thus plays a more prominent active role in attempting to end the curse at the end of the Ring's story than he had at any previous point in it. It is he, the guilty father figure who attempts to redeem the world of the curse, not one of his children, Brunnhilda, who is innocent of the original sin.

But then a change comes as the storyline shifts to that of the Celestials, with the appearance at the foot of Odin's cross by the maternal figure of the Earth Spirit, echoing the imagery of the Virgin Mary at the foot of Christ's cross. (The pictorial association of Mother Earth with the Virgin Mary recurs in the final panel of the story with its Pieta tableau.) Here as in her later

PRESSING THE COLD TIP OF HIS SACRED SPEAR GUNGNIR TO HIS HAIRY BREAST—
—ODIN THROWS HIM SELF AGAINST IT, PIERCING HIS UNIMAGINABLE FLESH—IMPALING HIMSELF!
THE HOUND, NOT UNLIKE THAT RECENTLY INJURED BY HIS MORTAL SON, WILL HASTEN HIS END.
THEN, MUNIN AND HUGINN TAKE HIS WRISTS IN THEIR POWERFUL CLAWS, BEARING HIM ALOFT—
—AND HAIL HIM BY THE RHINEGOLD RING—NAILED TO A BRANCH OF YGGDRASIL!
—NOW, MY FAITHFUL RAVENS, THOU SHALT SIT ON MY SHOULDERS NEVERMORE—LEST THEY COME AND TAKE GUNGNIR FROM MY SIGHT AS WELL. PERHAPS THOU SHALT FIND ONE WORTHIER TO WIELD THE SPEAR OF HEAVEN! FAREWELL!
AT THEM LORD! COMMANDS THE RAVENS AS THEY FLIGHT LEAVES ODIN TO HIS SELF-CHOSEN FATE. ODIN HANGS... PINIONED BY A POWER GREATER THAN HIS OWN— DRAINING STRENGTH AND WISDOM FROM HIM IN RIVULETS OF RED, NOURISHING THE COSMIC TREE.
IN HIS INEFFABLE AGONY ODIN RAVES... DRAVE TO THE ELDER GODS WHO SPAWNED HIM. THAT HIS SACRIFICE WILL BE ENOUGH TO STAVE OFF THE FINAL DAY OF RECKONING FOR THE GODS... THE DAY OF RAGNAROK!!!

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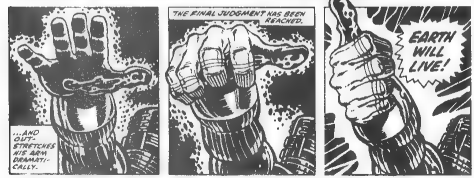
encounter with the Celestials, Mother Earth embodies mercy and forgiveness. She lets Odin know that he has suffered enough and that to allow himself to die is once again to shirk his responsibilities: he is needed to deal with the menace that the Celestials pose to humanity, and through them to the gods. "Suddenly filled with vitality and a new sense of purpose beyond any he has ever known," Odin returns to the role the king of a pantheon of gods should fulfill, that of protector of his subjects, both divine and human. The unspoken theme is that through striving to the utmost on behalf of humanity and the other gods, Odin will truly redeem himself of his past sins.

It must be noticed that Gruenwald and Macchio are not simply making alterations in Wagner's Odin, but major changes in Marvel's version as well. Thor's allegiance to and love for Odin in past Marvel stories has always seemed rather absurd and pathetic. No matter how often Thor hailed him as "all-wise" and "all-knowing" or even "the will, the way and the wonder" in one tale, Marvel's Odin has often seemed little more than a badtempered, imperious yet petty old man, forever singing his own praises even as he flew into irrational rages and heaped undeserved punishments on his unoffending son. The Odin of issue 300 represents a characterization change for the better: he is possessed of nobility, courage, true wisdom and even a welcome sense of humility. This is an Odin worthy of ruling Asgard.

I AM THE ELDER GODDESS KNOWN IN ALL LEGENDS AS MOTHER EARTH, AND I HAVE COME WITH AN OFFERING
...THE VOW OF MY CHILDREN, SELECTED BY THE GODS OF THIS SPHERE FROM AMONG MANKIND'S BILLIONS, EACH REPRESENTS THE ANSWER!
SHE GESTURES AND...
THE HIGHEST IDEALS TOWARD WHICH THE HUMAN RACE MAY ASPIRE.
AND THESE I OFFER TO YOU, CELESTIALS, IN EXCHANGE FOR THE LIFE OF THIS WORLD. THOUGH I LOVE EACH AS A CHILD, I AM WILLING TO PART WITH THEM.
* ODIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE TWELVE WAS BIRTHRIGHT BY THE WARRIORS THREE IN ISSUE #238!. —J.S.

I AM THE SPIRIT OF ALL LIFE ON EARTH. THROUGHOUT TIME, I HAVE WATCHED IT GROW AND NURTURED ITS STUMBLING PROGRESS. AND I WILL NOT SEE THE FRUITS OF MY LABORS DESTROYED BY ANY FORCE! WITH ALL MY POWER WILL I, AND MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS...
LET THEM LEARN THE MYSTERIES OF THE COSMOS AT YOUR FEET. LET THEM BE AS ONE WITH YOU... AND DISCOVER HOW MUCH YOU HAVE TO LEARN FROM THEM—AND THOSE LIKE THEM ON COUNTLESS EARTHS.
I BESEECH YOU - TAKE MY LOVED ONES AND LEAVE THIS WORLD IN PEACE. CONSIDER THEM YOUR CHILDREN AS WELL, FOR THEY ARE CAST IN YOUR IMAGE AS MUCH AS IN MY OWN.
FOR WHAT SEEMS AN ETERNITY, THE CELESTIALS CONFER. THEN ARISHEM STEPS FORWARD...



The next phase of the epic re-establishes, sharpens and extends one of the themes of the Ring saga. Once again Odin finds himself opposing a power far greater than his own that threatens his world, but this time it is not mysterious, abstract curse but the towering, awesome Celestials, who make his claims to omnipotence seem gross exaggerations indeed. The peril appears incalculably greater than before, and the conflict is played out on a far grander scale, for now all of Earth's pantheons of gods are involved. Not just Odin but Zeus, Vishnu and the rest are forced to recognize that their powers are nothing compared to the threat before them, and that they are not masters of their fate, but its potential victims.

But there is another difference: this time the menace is not of Odin's making, and this time he takes it upon himself from the very beginning to do battle with the danger loosed on the world. The Rhinegold, which once he coveted as a means to aggrandizing power for himslf, is now cast by Odin into the weapon for Earth's defense. (One might say that not only is the "All-Father" defending his "children"—his subjects—but his spouse, earth herself.) No longer does Odin manipulate events from behind the scenes; instead he takes the leading role, even among his peers, the leaders of the other pantheons. Finally, Odin advances to the final battle alone, ready to give his life for humanity's, wearing the armor of the Destroyer and bearing a great sword, thereby conjuring up a stirring variation on a traditional image of romance: as the authors put it, "he is the ultimate knight in shining armor ready to do battle against the ultimate threat."

Over the years Marvel has presented many characers embodying various visions of God, such as the Watcher, who observes mankind with compassionate interest, but will not lift his hand to help them. The Odin of *Thor* 300 is God as loving father and passionate protector of mankind. The Celestials, as they have always been, represent a vision of God as incomprehensible, uncaring and wrathful, who has given each of us life only to take it away from us eventually, apparently because we cannot live up to standards of perfection. Odin cannot prevail against their overwhelming force and is killed. Shortly thereafter, Arishem annihilates the Rhinegold, which had been transformed into Odin's Oversword, as well he might since the curse has finally claimed its intended victim. But Odin had in the end died a truly heroic death, which more than makes up for anything he has done in the past. Until now, Thor has stood in the same position as the readers, first listening to the storyof the Ring and of Odin's first

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meeting with the Celestials, and then watching their cataclysmic battle. But now, with Odin's demise he delivers his own judgment on Earth's would-be judges, voicing what must be the readers own sentiments on witnessing these events: "Ye are naught but murderers!" Where before Odin took responsibility upon himself after Thor's demise (as Siegfried), so now Thor charges into the fray upon his father's death, and succeeds in creating a partial reversal. Arishem had forced Odin to bow before him; now Thor topples Arishem from the pylons that serve as his throne.

But Odin's avenger also fails to defeat the absolutely unconquerable Arishem, and Thor too is about to meet his death when Mother Earth again appears. This maternal goddess, with her reasoned arguments and pleas for mercy, succeeds where all the warrior "god-fathers" of Earth had failed. When Odin hung himself she had argued that his sacrifice of his life was insufficient for the task at hand. Now that Odin and Thor have both sacrificed their lives in vain, Mother Earth comes up with a different kind of sacrifice that proves equal to the need at hand. She presents the Celestials with the twelve Young Gods, representatives of the best in humanity, not to be killed but to be guided to achieving their full potential. In a sense the struggles of Thor and Odin have been unnecessary, for humanity has proved itself worthy of survival, and moreover, capable of attaining greatness that this story, like so many other memorable ones at Marvel (e.g., Rick Jones' role at the end of the Kree-Skrull War, Phoenix's rescue of the universe from annihilation), symbolizes as godhood. Earth has spawned a new order of gods, who have the humanity the Celestials lack, and who, interestingly, are divided equally between the sexes in sharp contrast to the patriarchal pantheons of Earth's other deities and the (presumably) all-male conclave of Celestials. The finale of *Thor* 300 may seem to involve a *deus ex machina* that averts the complete tragedy in the making, but what it really gives us is a myth of rebirth, with young gods rising to save and redeem Earth where their elders have failed and even died in trying to do so.

Surprisingly enough, the end of *Thor* 300 even remains true to Wagnerian themes. The young hero whom Wagner's Odin hoped would save his world arises in the form of the twelve Young Gods. Earth is redeemed with the death of an old order of gods, for Odin dies in both versions. Finally, the central redeeming figure in *Thor* 300 is a woman, Mother Earth, just as Wagner so often uses women in the same roll: Brunnhilda in the *Ring*, Senta in *The Flying Dutchman*, Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*.

Since *Thor* is a tale of gods, miracles are possible in its world, and gods may be literally reborn. Odin has earned resurrection by his heroism, and so it is entirely fitting that he and the rest of the Asgardians return through Thor's heroic efforts in issue 301. To his own childlike amazement, Thor succeeds in working a miracle and turning his fondest dream into reality: the restoration of the dead to life. The Ring/Celestials saga brought us to the brink of the point of ultimate tragedy, and then inspirationally reversed itself, concluding with the traditional ending of comedies: a great party and feast held by the joyful community

The *X-Men*, though, is a story of humans, albeit ones with unusual powers, and the tragedy of Phoenix is neither averted in issue 137 nor undone in 138. The *Thor* saga ends with a celebration; the X-Men's with a funeral. Phoenix's tragedy follows a familiar tragic pattern, that of the being at the top of fortune's wheel who suffers an ignominious fall. She had achieved godlike power, and her relationship with her lover, after a problem-ridden past, had finally reached consummation (132) and the brink of marriage (136). A tragic hero represents some of humanity's finest attributes, and Jean Grey certainly did that. In 135 we are told that when she saved the universe (back in 108) she embodied the "best" that is in humanity. Cyclops takes this even further in 136: he reminds Jean of her willingness to sacrifice her life for love of him and the other X-Men (issue 100) and then for love of mankind (108) and tells her that she "is love" itself. The opening of 135 dwells on her other admirable qualities, such as courage and intelligence. She is cast as an ideal, just as *Thor* 300's Young Gods are. Then that ideal is destroyed.

It is a commonplace that the tragic hero suffers his doom because of the "tragic flaw" in his personality. Hamlet even makes a speech about it on the battlements as he awaits his father's ghost, and notes that the flaw may not be the fault of its bearer. Jean's "tragic flaw" is, in essence, the very fact that she is human. The key to understanding this is Jason Wyngarde's mental soliloquy in the opening of issue 129, in which he expounds on the two sides, the "yin and yang," as he puts it, of the human personality. That there is a good and a bad side to the human psyche is, of course, a literary concept that is most popularly familiar perhaps, in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a clear forerunner of the Dark Phoenix epic, but which also goes at least as far back as the morality plays of medieval times.

Jason Wyngarde, otherwise known as Mastermind, is Satan, Iago, Svengali and Frankenstein rolled up in one: he tempts Jean, puts her under his mental domination, and ultimately turns her into a monster who destroys him. He calls what he does to Jean a "psychic seduction," but that term implies the element of choice. It seems to me that Wyngarde outdoes the traditional devil of fiction: Wyngarde does not persuade Jean to choose evil, but forces it upon her. He tells us in that soliloquy that he is upsetting the balance of good and evil in her mind, awakening the repressed, unconscious amoral drives that lie within us all. Note that Jean's reactions after experiencing one of the "timeslip" visions Wyngarde sends her are invariably those of bewilderment, not pleasure. In fact, the one time that a vision involves something worse than wearing the Black Queen costume, the notorious human "stag hunt," even while in the grip of the vision, Jean refuses to go through with the murder requested of her. The focus of the visions is on love for Wyngarde, but that love does not carry over to her "waking" life outside them. When Wyngarde finally turns her into the Black Queen, she is clearly entirely under his control until he "kills" Scott. After that, she is no longer under his command, but her psyche has already been altered. Storm noticed the change wreaked in her personality during the battle with the White Queen (131) and this ruthlessness persists in the scene in which she reduces Mastermind to a vegetable (134). Wyngarde is not a "psychic seducer" but a psychic rapist.

On seeing the Black Queen, one of the X-Men exclaims "That is not Jean Grey!" and it seems to this reviewer that anyone with a sense of Jean's personality from past issues must agree. It is inconceivable that the Jean before Mastermind's psychic meddling would ever have considered committing the outrages the Black Queen does, much less Dark Phoenix's atrocities. It therefore seems to this reviewer undeniably obvious that as Dark Phoenix, Jean was insane, and hence not responsible for her actions. The Dark Phoenix story is really a tale of demonic possession, set in a context of science fiction. Readers do demand the death of a possessed child in these stories, even if he or she kills people while possessed, because it is obviously not the child's fault. Phoenix was, so to speak, "possessed" by the dark, repressed side of her own consciousness, and there are moments in the story when Jean's normal personality struggles to the surface for a moment and makes it quite clear she cannot control her actions as Dark Phoenix and is appalled by them. Let's take some cases closer to home for comics readers. Is Bruce Banner responsible for all the Hulk's actions, or Bruce Gordon's for any of Eclipso's? Should the Thing be sent to prison because of those Lee-Kirby stories in which he was brainwashed into wanting to kill the rest of the Fantastic Four?

In devising this situation in which Jean is Dark Phoenix, and yet Dark Phoenix is not her true self, Claremont and Byrne have worked a remarkable variation on the tragic format. The flawed tragic lead whose actions bring about his or her own doom has been fused with the helpless, innocent female victim of the tragic

course of events. It is as if Lady Macbeth and Desdemona were the same person. My colleague Peter Gillis referred to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, and I shall do the same. Frye speaks of the tragic hero as being who had had "an extraordinary, often a nearly divine, destiny within his grasp" but usually suffers from "hybris, a proud, passionate, obsessed or soaring mind which brings about a morally intelligible downfall." Frye points to Nietzche's view of the tragic hero who is possessed of "a Dionysiac aggressive will, intoxicated by dreams of its own omnipotence." this clearly and literally is Dark Phoenix. Frye also speaks of "the suppliant, the character, often female who presents a picture of unmitigated helplessness,"often is "threatened with death or rape" and often has "lost a place of greatness." He continues, "In the figure of the suppliant, pity and terror are brought to the highest possible ntch of intensity." Jean was a victim of "rape" by Wyngarde, and Frye's description of the suppliant certainly applies to her in every respect in 137. What makes the conclusion of 137 so depressing is the fact that it involves the martyrdom of an innocent. One's usual reaction to tragedy, Frye notes, is that the tragic hero must die and yet it is a shame that he must. Claremont and Byrne intensify our sorrowful response to this dichotomy by separating the noble and reprehensible qualities of their tragic heroine into two separate personalities, and then, in the revised ending to 137, making it impossible to exorcise the evil side without destroying the good side as well by killing Jean.

Thor 300 moves toward a tragic conclusion and then averts it at the last moment, and concludes in the next issue with a party, in the traditional manner of comedy. The Dark Phoenix saga takes the opposite course, and moves toward a "comic" denoement, only suddenly to plunge into deep tragedy. *X-Men* 136 ends not only with the exorcism of Jean's Dark Phoenix side and the rebirth of her normal personality, but it even signals a move toward that other traditional conclusion of comedy, marriage, with Scott's proposal. The abrupt shift to a tragic course finds its visual equivalent in the characters' equally sudden removal to Lilandra's starship, where Jean finds herself sentenced. It is in the nature of tragedy that the hero's actions to subvert the order of his or her world provoke an eventual reaction, that re-establishes that order at a price to the hero, and that harsh price is exacted regardless of the hero's merits. Jean does not deserve either death or a psychic lobotomy, but the restoration of order to the cosmos requires that she undergo such a fate. For one thing, there are those like Lilandra's prime minister, who, with a blindness to true justice, argue that Dark Phoenix's mass murders demand that Jean be made a scapegoat to be punished for them. More realistically, there is Lilandra herself, who believes that the chance of Dark Phoenix's return cannot be risked, and that therefore Jean's life must be sacrificed in order that the rest of the universe's denizens might live. So this tragedy follows the pattern of others: a sacrifice to rid the community of evil and disorder. But, as with other tragedies, one senses that great potential for good has been destroyed along with the bad, and that the world may now be a more stable, orderly place, but also a lesser one than before.

The final ending to issue 137 is both bleaker and more inspiring than the original one. It is bleaker because the original ending allowed Jean to survive, thereby showing that the world's justice was not without some mercy, and that despite catastrophe, love—that between Scott and Jean—could also survive. 137's ending gives us a cosmos that demands Jean pay the ultimate penalty for bearing a power she in fact had never asked for, and leaves Scott alive but utterly desolate.

Yet Jean is merely a victim in 137's original ending. The new denouement allows her to die heroically. The sacrifice of her life becomes a courageous, noble *self*-sacrifice: she finally proves able to master the surging passions of Dark Pheonix long enough to kill herself, lest she take even one more innocent life in her madness. Even if someday Marvel should bring Jean Grey back from the dead, the emotional power of this ending will remain undiminished. Yet though the Watcher is correct in all he says in the issue's final panels about Jean's self-sacrifice being the X-Men's greatest victory, it is a grim, melancholy, disturbing victory indeed. It is just the kind of victory one associates with tragedy.

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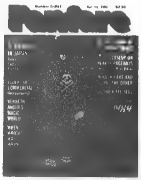

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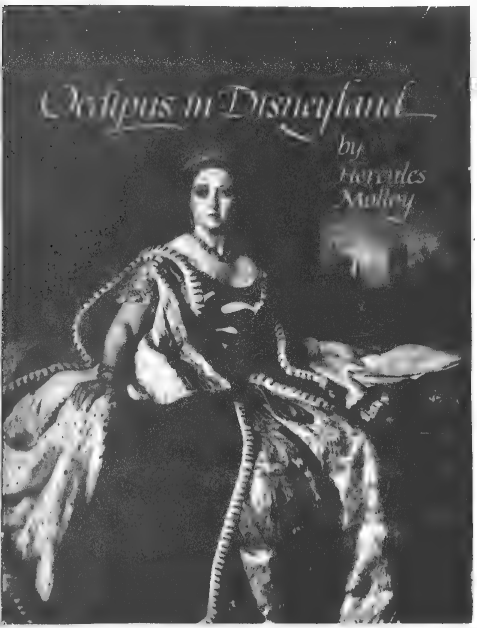
Guilty Fantasies

by Peter B. Gillis



Oh, you're not going to like this one.

There's this book, you see, of which this column is a review. I was cautioned by friends not to review it, and those who did recommend reviewing it did so with a strange gleam in their eyes that made me speculate, just for a brief moment, mind you, that there was something of the malevolent in their intent.

As a result, I'm doing this review as a personal pronouncement. In the time that it's been in my possession, I've become defensive about it, even protective, giving it to people to look through with a strange and perhaps malevolent gleam in *my* eye, in a strange sort of defiance.

This, O my brothers and sisters, is a genuinely unpleasant book.

Its title is *Oedipus in Disneyland*, subtitled *Queen Victoria's Reincarnation as Superman*; it was written by someone named Hercules Molloy, and was published by an outfit in San Francisco called the Paranoid Press. It was printed in 1972, and now is out of print (I assume). I got put onto it by a rock musician friend of mine, Max Sinclair (Hi, Max!) who picked it up in a bargain bin. This is another reason for doing it in this column, since I have no earthly idea how to get a copy of this book. For reasons which will soon become apparent, I'm not giving out the address of said Paranoid Press.

Oedipus in Disneyland's protagonist is Clark Kent, a.k.a. Superman. The story is narrated—well, this is a bit complex—in the first person by Superman and in the third person about Clark Kent. For the most part, the book goes along saying "Kent did this" and "Kent did that", except that once in a while (and it's just seldom enough to be really startling), it breaks into "I felt" or "I did" and it is Superman speaking. This narrative convention breaks down at the end, as does everything else.

Of course, this constitutes an infringement on a trademarked character, and when some of the folks at DC read this review (or worse yet, read the *book*), some thought may be given to suing these guys, especially after what they do to Clark: after he graduates from Yale (class of '62), Clark proceeds to get laid in a number of explicitly described fashions by a number of stereotypical women. As a matter of fact, that's about all he does: he meets up with a socialite named G. Gor3don Gustaviskor (the 3 is silent) and his sidekick Mydog Tige, and they go around crashing debutante's balls and weaseling their way into High Society. This phase ends when Bruce Wayne exposes Kent as not a member of the New York Social Register crowd, but a mere reporter. From there, Clark moves to Los Angeles where he meets Wonder Woman, whom he finds masturbating at a rock concert in Golden Gate Park. They hit if off, attend some orgies, and finally Superman gets busted for possession of marijuana and locked up in a jail in Mexico. This ends the first part of the book.

Now, from the mere summary, there may be a few among you that might imagine this

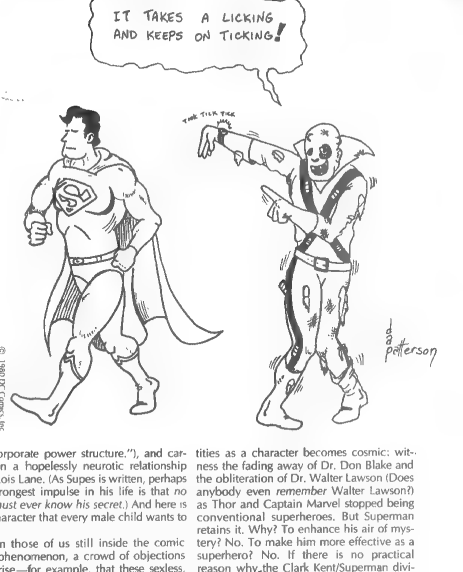
to be a freewheeling, satirical debunking of one of our sacred symbols, a Hunter S. Thompsonesque romp through contemporary culture. If this were true, this would be a minor, forgettable book, another of those "wild and crazy guys" of the book world. What is remarkable about this book is that it is *not funny*, nor is it meant to be. Not only is it in poor taste, it is so unreservedly serious in its intent and meticulously leaden in its presentation that I don't think you can come away from this book without feeling that you've been put through the wringer of an appallingly rusty washing machine. It is, in short, an extremely powerful book, and as such I've taken it to my breast.

The second part of the book illustrates far more what this book is really about: while in this Mexican jail cell, Clark Kent reads a copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. By looking at it using the methods of modern psychological theories, Victorian history, and paranoia, Clark discovers that *Alice* is nothing more nor less than Queen Victoria's own pornographic autobiography! (This takes well over 100 pages of this oversized paperback.) Armed with this devastating and seemingly all-explaining insight, Kent invades Disneyland and, his super-powers being neutralized by Wonder Woman and Jimmy Olsen, who slipped LSD into his cherry coke (it is revealed that Kryptonite is really LSD), he metamorphoses into Queen Victoria herself and, flashing power beams from her scepter, destroys Disneyland. The whole process is, of course, a Communist plot to show the inherent instability of the Western capitalist system.

And this guy Molloy is serious about this. The whole slightly silly quality of the actual activity in the book is drowned out by page after page of psycho-sociology, proving the essential neurosis and psychic corruption of America, and especially its mass-culture symbols. *Alice* is subjected to a complete mangling, with the author picking and choosing passages, stretching correspondences far beyond the bounds of probability, all in a mechanistic style. Molloy is hell-bent on fitting these characters, Alice and Supes, into his theory no matter how much violence he does to them. *Oedipus in Disneyland* is too serious to be enjoyed (or dismissed) as satirical literature, and too frivolous to be valued (or dismissed) as a sociological tract.

Fine. So where does this leave the comic book fan in all this, other than with a feeling that he or she never wants to open the cover of this book, and a growing conviction that this guy Gillis should be given a new sport-coat with no holes in the sleeves and a buckle in the back?

The problem that Molloy addresses himself to in *Oedipus in Disneyland* is that Superman, as he appears in comics and elsewhere, is a symbol of alienation and sexual repression. He is literally an alien, non-human, the only one of his kind (pretty much), and quite strangely keeps a "secret identity" he doesn't really need (as Molloy puts it, "super-powers do not inhibit one in the corporate power structure."), and carries on a hopelessly neurotic relationship with Lois Lane. (As Supes is written, perhaps the strongest impulse in his life is that *no one must ever know his secret*.) And here is the character that every male child wants to be!



From those of us still inside the comic book phenomenon, a crowd of objections can arise—for example, that these sexless, secret-identified superheroes are more the opportunity for fantasy of the broadest sort, and it is this fantasy that attracts kids—but Molloy is right: Superman is a symbol of repression. Molloy makes his point in a totally unappetizing fashion by giving Clark Kent a sex life which is every bit as neurotic as Clark's in the comics, except that it is characterized by activity as opposed to inactivity. Still, his point is a good one. Why this alienation?

Molloy turns this question outward towards Western civilization in general, but it might be good to think about the question as it relates specifically to our beloved funny books. Yes, a secret identity was and is stock-in-trade for crimefighters from the Shadow onwards (and to my mind not used as well since then, with the possible exception, and that for totally different reasons, of Spider-Man), giving mystery and tension to the stories. But Superman stopped being a crimefighter long ago, and assumed cosmic proportions. He became a sort of a god. (Think about it: a mammoth statue of Superman in Metropolis harbor?) Over at Marvel, one sees the dropping away of secret identities as a character becomes cosmic: witness the fading away of Dr. Don Blake and the obliteration of Dr. Walter Lawson (Does anybody even *remember* Walter Lawson?) as Thor and Captain Marvel stopped being conventional superheroes. But Superman retains it. Why? To enhance his air of mystery? No. To make him more effective as a superhero? No. If there is no practical reason why the Clark Kent/Superman division exists, and it has existed for so long, there must be something fundamental about it. And many might say, yes, it is wish-fulfillment: we, as Clark Kent, want to become Superman. But why on Earth would we want to keep it a secret? After someone becomes Superman, why remain Clark Kent one moment longer?

If Superman were just wish-fulfillment, the negative aspects like Clark Kent's lack of respect (part of the "necessary" secret-identity game) and his failure to relate to women (the two are related) would not be there. Instead we have a flawed symbol, an alienated, strange hero, who just might be capable of turning into Queen Victoria and destroying our childhood dreams, or at least exposing the dark side of them. And that may be part of the repelling strength of *Oedipus in Disneyland*: it says what we find unpleasant, in a tone we find unpleasant, and yet there's a reality to it. There are ready-made places for its words in our psyches, places left blank by the one-sidedness of our fantasies.

Of course, I could be wrong. But pick the book up anyway, if you come across it.

NEXT ISSUE

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and about his new plans with Marshall Rogers and without DC Comics!

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A Capp-ital Farce

by Peter Sanderson

The Museum of Cartoon Art in Port Chester, New York has been holding an exhibition through this month of the work of the late Al Capp, concentrating, of course, on his famous strip *Li'l Abner*, but also featuring examples of two other strips he worked on, *Abbie 'n' Slats* and *Long Sam*. The show is especially welcome, since unless one has a large collection of old Sunday newspaper comics sections in the attic, it's hard to get a look at *Abner* strips nowadays. Whereas virtually every installment of *Pogo*, *Peanuts* and *Doonsbury* seems to have found its way into book form, to my knowledge there have been only two book collections of *Abner*, though it like the other three had tremendous popularity: *The World of Li'l Abner* (1952, Ballentine Books) and *The Best of Li'l Abner* (1978, Holt, Rinehart and Winston). (Do any readers know of any others?)

The more I see of *Abner*, the more I like the series, but there are some serious roadblocks in the way of getting to appreciate it. One, prominently featured in the show, is Capp's notorious creation S.W.I.N.E., the Students Wildly Indignant about Nearly Everything, all with heads buried in unruly hair and circled by flies. In the 9/21/69 Sunday page on display a crowd of S.W.I.N.E., one bearing a club with a protruding nail, another carrying a heavy chain, take over an inoffensive man's store. "We're making this into a people's store," one of the invaders proclaims, having brutally grabbed the owner by the neck. "B-but we're people!!" the owner protests as he is tossed out the door. Someone tosses "skonk essence" into the store to disperse the student radicals but it fails to overpower them—or their own odor. "Is th' day o' th' skonk over? Has they been replaced by S.W.I.N.E.?" mourns an observer.

Well. Also on display are reproductions of the "Joanie Phoanie" sequence (12/31/66—2/13/67) about a hypocritical folk singer who exploits poverty as a subject for records that make her millions, and, on the side, can offer you an "immortal ballad of love for the Viet Cong." Capp's apparent target, (though he denied it), Joan Baez, replies to his attacks in newspaper and magazine articles accompanying the display. "Either out of ignorance or malice, he has made being for peace equal to being for Communism, the Viet Cong and narcotics," she is reported as saying.

The excesses of late 1960s student radicalism were certainly a proper subject for a satirist; what bothers me about Capp's treatment of the topic is, as Baez suggested, he accuses and condemns many for the actions and opinions of the relative few. Some of the stories in *Best of Li'l Abner* indicate he thought of S.W.I.N.E. as representing their entire generation. In the tale about the magic food Snapples, which can turn anyone into a teenager, envious adults wonder, "Why should they be the only ones who pay no taxes and take no baths?" The equally magical Shmoos, we are told in another of the book's stories, are more lovable than children, who are represented by an unshaven young punk and a bawling little girl. Are there no normal young people? No rational anti-war people? Not even young Republicans?

The Shmoos story also informs us that men will find Shmoos more lovable than their wives because "they're better housekeepers . . .and they *never* nag!!" (That's all women do, according to the strip, which invariably splits the sex into beauties and grotesques with nothing in between.) The strip's disturbing misanthropy reaches a peak in *World of Li'l Abner*'s "Target for Tonight," in which all of Abner's neighbors in Dogpatch celebrate the prospect of his death, since they are beneficiaries of his life insurance policy.

Then there is the title character himself. Capp described Abner as an "innocent," but the word connotes ignorance of evil, not stupidity, and the strip often made the point that Abner was as stupid as they come. In "Zoot Suit Yokum" in *World of Li'l Abner*, Abner is shown to have "the lowest I.Q. in America," when he gets a headache trying to add four and four, thereby proving himself stupider than his rival, who is presented as virtually subhuman ("I found him dangling from a tree in Yellowstone National Park, boss!"). An innocent, ignorant character makes a good comedic hero, and so does a "wise fool," who wittingly or unwittingly exposes the folly of the presumably smarter people around him. Abner falls into the latter category in his exchange with a pair of S.W.I.N.E. members in the show's 4/3/66 page. They are trying to get him to lend them bus fare to Washington, and he asks why they don't try to earn it. They want to know how. "There's nothing we know how to do!!" says one. "Except run the world, of course!!" adds the other. Abner smiles knowlingly and says "Of course!!—Sigh! All *we* knows is how to take care of ourselfs, but they knows how to run th' world!!" It's easy to sympathize with a character who uses "mere" common sense to cast an ironic perspective on his supposed betters. On the other hand, if that common sense is absent, and the character enjoys the abuse he either receives or doles out, he can easily arouse the reader's disdain or even contempt. In "The Tommy Wholesome Show" in *The Best of Li'l Abner*, Abner is thrilled at his job crouching beneath the desk of Capp's excessively bad-tempered caricature of Johnny Carson and letting this TV star kick him in the face. Are we supposed to think Abner merits our sympathy for being this absurdly dumb? He comes off as unpleasantly masochistic, willing to demean himself to any extent to get close to celebrated people. The way Abner seems oblivious to Daisy Mae's pathetic pining for him before their marriage, and even during the honeymoon, is obviously meant to be funny, but there is a dis-

LET GO!!
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AH, DON'T WANT 'EM TO SEE OUR LI'L MOOSICAL ARGYMINT OUT IN TELEVISION LAND—
THIS CARD'LL HIDE US—
HYSTERICAL APPLAUSE

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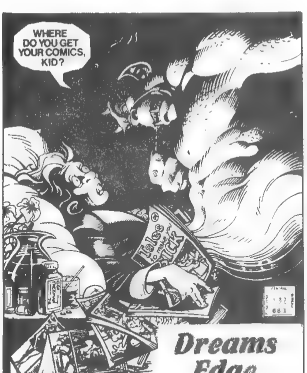

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WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO BE IT? — LIKE THEM ??
WHY SHOULD THEY BE THE ONLY ONES WHO PAY NO TAXES AND TAKE NO BATHS?
LET'S ORGANIZE!! LET'S GIVE 'EM A TASTE OF MIDDLE-AGE POWER!!
YAY!! "MIDDLE-AGE POWER!!"
IT HAS AN UGLY S-SOUND!!
10-5
Al Capp

turbing undercurrent of cruelty in it as well.

As far as the fool as hero is concerned, I myself prefer Capp's Fearless Fosdick, the caricature of Dick Tracy (and obvious forerunner of film's Inspector Clouseau) whose adventures often replaced Abner's own in the Sunday or daily strips, even during virtually all of *Li'l Abner's* last week of strips (11/1—5/77), which are on display at the show, during which Fosdick survives a fall from atop the Washington Monument and drills a criminal full of (non-lethal) bullet holes for walking on the grass. The difference with Fosdick is that Capp is not making fun of the hero's stupidity so much as he is mocking Fosdick's pretentiousness: Fosdick doesn't know what a fool he is.

What draws my interest in the strip is not its politics or its main characters, but its subsidiary characters and other creations. The strength of the Museum's Capp exhibition is the emphasis it puts on his amazing inventiveness in populating *Abner's* fantasy world. In his introduction to *Best*, Capp confesses that in *Abner* he was "redrawing" his own impoverished childhood and improving it in the process. With that statement to guide us, we can see why Abner's Dogpatch, a town of hill folk living in poverty, is also a pastoral paradise, home of a society, and more specifically, a family, the Yokums, that maintains and prizes values like love and justice despite assaults from the outside, rich, urbanized world. This is a traditional theme in literature, which *Abner* happens to treat in contemporary, farcical and even fantastic ways without undercutting its author's belief in it or our own.

Abner also provides, in a good sense, a childlike view of the world. The villains are outright ogres, willing to sacrifice anything, even scores of innocent lives, in pursuit of their selfish goals. Yet the villains too are like children, uncontrolled and monstrous, in their fanatical desires to possess something; General Bullmoose, the embodiment of amoral greed; J. Roaringham Fatback, with his frenzied passion to steal the Yokum's pet pig, the last of a species prized by gourmets; or the numerous men and women out to force Daisy Mae or Abner into marrying them, both before and after Abner and Daisy Mae's own wedding. The villains even treat people as objects to possess. Luckily the perfect opponent for these villains, to a child's point of view, also inhabits the series: the all-powerful Mammy Yokum, who can right any wrong with her fists or with the sheer psychic force of her own goodness.

That brings up another aspect of *Abner's* fantasy world: it is a place where magic exists. The Museum show has excerpts from several sequences featuring the Shmoos, who can turn into any kind of food and accomplish any kind of task, and could therefore turn the world into utopia, but whom society opposes. "With Shmoos," gasps a military man in *Best*, "there's nothing left to *work for*—to *fight, gouge, chisel* and *cheat* for!!— And without *those* amusements, civilized society will collapse!!" People can release their hostilities by kicking other creatures called Kigmies, can alter their faces completely through incredible forms of plastic surgery, can grow enormously fat by eating Mud Mushrooms, weightless by eating Mockaroni, strong and sexually aroused by breating air with "goombo" in it, or young by eating Snapples. In one sequence in *Best*, Abner, in becoming the lead in another comic strip, a Caniff burlesque called *Steve Cantor*. Those who think that the only comics characters who can achieve godlike cosmic power work for Marvel should take a look at *Abner's* Evil Eye Keegle and his "whammies." In the 6/9/76 strip in the show Abner tells us "With ⅛ of one he kin see *through solid steel*!—with a ¼ o' one he kin *melt* it!!" That's hardly all: in *Best* his ultimate whammy moves the sun out of orbit! If not for Mammy Yokum's efforts, all life on Earth would have been destroyed.

That shows us another aspect of the "magic" of *Abner's* world: it can create nightmares come true. In *Best* Abner loses him memory and becomes unrecognizably fat by eating Mud Mushrooms, and has to suffer rejection by Daisy Mae, who no longer recognizes him and whom he no longer recognizes. At least twice villains try to achieve their ends by unleashing the Turnip Termites in Dogpatch to devour the crops, and reducing the Dogpatchers to starving living skeletons as a result. Capp notes on a map of Dogpatch in the show that the Yokums' cabin is "built for comfort and safety. Above is Teetering Rock, which any passing breeze is liable to topple upon them. Below is Bottomless Canyon, from which nothing has ever returned." Abner's world is a fearfully insecure one, in which a bond of love or even one's life easily comes into danger. Another of the strip's prominent characters, featued in the show, is Gladstone Gander's total opposite. Joe Btfsplk, "the world's worst jinx," who always goes about with a cloud of bad luck (which, as some of the show's strips demonstrate, is alive and sentient) over his head. It seems appropriate that the strip has such a character. It is Joe's presence near Fleegle that nearly causes the end of the world. In the show's 12/20/70 Sunday strip, Joe has miraculously escaped the cloud, has become handsome and is about to marry "America's most gorgeous debutante" when the cloud, sitting in a bar, spots him on the Cronkite show, speeds back to him and plunges him back into his eternal nightmare. (Here's another request for readers: does anyone know if Btfsplk's name inspired Mxyzptlk's in *Superman*?)

But what makes Abner a happily comedic comic series is the fact that no matter what absurdly exaggerated but nonetheless dire peril arises, everything always turns out for the best either through an improbable but welcome twist of fate, the workings of good "magic", or just plain heroic action of the heroes' part. Capp wrote in *World of Li'l Abner* that his method was to have his characters find "naive solutions" to their "monstrous tribulations." Fate always helps the innocents of *Abner* in the end. In fact, in the story of his wedding to Daisy Mae, reprinted in both books, Abner, fearing marriage as a little boy might, gives way to comic hubris in his confidence, even as Marryin' Sam pronounces them man and wife, that "miracle" will occur to save him. What he does not realize is that this time there is working to help another innocent, the long-suffering Daisy Mae, who had waited for the marriage for years. This time marriage was not to be presented as a menace to be fled in Capp's annual Sadie Hawkins Day race. For once the childlike fantasy world in the strip made way for something else, however amusingly presented: a story in which a boy had to accept an adult responsibility.

End Notes
by Peter Sanderson

Perhaps the first thing to be said about *The Empire Strikes Back* is that it should give us all a warm feeling that We Comics Readers Are Not Alone. *Star Wars* is the top grossing film of all time, it has been predicted that *Empire* may even equal or surpass that record, and the *Superman* movie has so far come in third. Even if each comic sells only a few hundred thousand copies per issue, there are obviously a lot of people out there who enjoy comics-style adventure fantasy.

Empire also serves as a reminder that this sort of material will forever be looked upon with condescension. *The Village Voice*'s film critic Andrew Sarris sneered at it as a film "for prepubescent tastes." Oh, well. In one respect, though, Sarris is right: the *Star Wars* films have so far lacked any real sexual dimension. The Leia-Han subplot, with their squabbling leading to her acknowledgement of love for him, fails to transcend cliche and never generates enough romantic feeling to charge Han's fate near the film's end with the aura of tragedy George Lucas has told interviewers he intended. The nature of friendship is handled well (especially in the silent parting between Luke and Han early in the film, when neither can find words to match their feeling), but love is treated unaffectingly. Besides, since Leia is constantly bitching for the first three quarters of the film, any viewer (and believe it or not, there are some) who never saw the first film would wonder why Luke and Han care so much about her. Then there's just plain sensual appeal, which can be present without corrupting the younger viewers: Lucas should take another look at the Raymond *Flash Gordon* strips he prizes so highly to find out how.

Empire also serves as a reminder of what film can do that comics can't. True, Al Williamson's art for Marvel's *Empire* adaptation is striking but not dynamic: for example, he shows the spacecraft seeming to drift quietly in space instead of hurtling through it. But no comics artist could have given the reader the sense of the incredible speed at which the snowspeeders and other craft move in the film. The climactic clash between Luke and Vader falls rather flat in the comic, and probably could have been done differently, especially had there been more space, so as to convey the harrowing power and rapidity it has in the movie. Speed is the key to the film's success. The comic goes at a leisurely pace, and as a result, the story seems too incomplete, too lacking in plot, and too much like the middle installment in a trilogy that it is. The film direction and editing, though, controls the pace at which the viewer follows the action, and speeds up that pace so that he is swept up by the rush of events.

The movie also makes everything look far more real than the comic does, and the actors' performances strengthen the characterizations. Luke's impetuousness and, at the end, his anguish, come across much more strongly in the film, and Yoda, who seems colorless in the comic, projects enormous charisma as performed by Frank Oz in the movie. Unfortunately, *Empire* turned out to be an average good comic, but fortunately, a great, classic adventure film.

The story turned out to be a surprise. I suspect most of us expected that it would end with another victory of the Rebels over the Empire in preparation for the overthrow of the Emperor himself, which appears from Lucas's recent interviews to be what will happen in the next film. But, if the rebels had won again in this second film, the Empire's defeat in the third would not just appear but feel like a foregone conclusion; generating an intense degree of suspense would not be so easy. So of course *Empire* has no "plot" at first glance: instead of putting a strategy, or plot, if you prefer, into effect against the Empire, the heroes are instead almost constantly being kept on the run by Vader and his forces. Order is reestablished at the end, and there is even cause for optimism over Han, but the Empire has been given restored credibility as a nearly invincible menace.

The author of *Time*'s cover story on *Empire*, thankfully, picked up on what most critics have ignored about the film, which is that its "meanings" lie in the archetypal patterns its storyline follows, and not in standard forms of characterization (although I agree some of those would have been nice, too). Oh, yes, readers, please skip this paragraph if you haven't seen the film yet because I'm about to reveal the Big Secret from the Ending. Namely, the revelation that Darth Vader is allegedly Luke's father (I warned you!) merely makes into fact what students of Freudian imagery would say has been implicit psychologically all along. Struggles between powerful, oppressive fathers and young, freedom-loving sons should seem familiar to comics readers acquainted with Darkseid and Orion, Fu Manchu and Shang-Chi, and even Odin and Thor before *Thor* 300. As others have noted, so far the *Star Wars* serial has been full of parental figures: the image of Luke's noble, deceased father, now exposed as false; Luke's uncle and aunt, who hold him back from a life of adventure, are then killed as if in horrible response to Luke's longing for freedom, and whom he goes to fight the Empire to avenge, as if through guilt (comparisons to Superman, Batman and Spider-Man can be made here); Ben Kenobi, the good surrogate (and maybe actual?) father whose wisdom becomes internalized (as a voice) in Luke's mind; and Vader, the authority figure out to destroy the lives and freedom of those under his control.

The first film is the story of Luke's maturation from a child under surrogate parental control into a man capable of winning great victories with the help of the Force, which is, like cosmic power in Marvel stories, a power signifying man's godlike potential, as well as a concept corresponding to Christian notions of grace (as far as the good side goes). In that first film, Lucas decides to follow the path of his idealized image of his father, and proves he can do it. In *Empire* Luke learns that he must strike out on his own path, for his father's led to the evil of Vader. Notice, by the way, the similarity between the scene in which Vader asks Luke to join him, and the Biblical story in which Satan tempted Christ atop a mountain with the possibility of ruling the world. This all relates to the vision Luke had of Vader in Dagobah (the equivalent of Dante's "Dark Wood of the Soul"?): that Vader had Luke's face, for Luke could potentially become a Vader if he misused his great powers. It is another Everyman story in which the hero must choose between good and evil.

It is hard, actually, to conceive of Luke ever choosing evil, but he is still supposed to be very young, and *can* err in deciding how to act responsibly. Lando chose correctly in belatedly deciding how to help his friend Han (thereby repeating Han's pattern of moral regeneration in deciding to help Luke against the Death Star) but, though I think we all sympathize with Luke when he decides against Ben's and Yoda's advice to go rescue his friends, the film shows that he made the wrong choice. Leia and company escape through Lando's help, not Luke's, and Luke's battle with Vader before he was truly ready leads only to Vader's severing of Luke's hand (which Freudians will tell you is castration imagery), demonstrating that in the moral universe of *Star Wars*, evil and error leave permanent, irreversible effects. One should not be as quick as some are to dismiss Luke as dumb if one sided with that decision of his to rescue Leia and Han from Vader.

One thing still bothers me. Yoda tells Ben that there is "one other" hope for the Rebels besides Luke. At first I thought maybe the Princess is the "other" and can wield the Force, since she, like Vader and Ben, can communicate with Luke telepathically. But then Lucas told *Rolling Stone* that the identity of "the other" will begin to become apparent in the first trilogy of films (*Empire* is #2 in the second trilogy) and be more so in the third. A Second Foundation at the opposite end of the galaxy, perhaps? And good lord, can you imagine what we'll all look like waiting in line on the opening day of the last Star Wars film over twenty years hence, with our kids and whitening hair? (Egad.) •

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